



# CHRONICLES OF AN AFRICAN ANCESTOR

The Beja/Tonga



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Learning Guide

First Print

VONAKANI MALULEKE

# **CHRONICLES OF AN AFRICAN ANCESTOR**

**The Beja Tonga**

**by**

**Vonakani Maluleke**

**Chronicles of an African Ancestor:**  
The Beja Tonga

**By Vonakani Maluleke**

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Second edition: First print, 2024

First edition published 2021, in ‘Tracing the Ancient African Dynasty of Beja Tonga in Southern Africa and Beyond’

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Publisher: Vonakani Maluleke

Country: South Africa

Book cover design: Malenga Publishing

Distributed by: MP Learning Guides

**ISBN (print): 9798326068064**

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## **Introduction and Background**

Forget everything you think you know about southern Africa. This is what I found myself doing after conducting research on the oldest documented history of southern Africa and the migration of African groups into what is now South Africa. The history I had learned at school was not enough to give me an elaborate story about the arrival of the “Bantu people” in southern Africa, and I am fortunate to be from one of the earliest African groups to have sought greener pastures in the south of Africa, as this helped me to engage with the history on a more personal level. In this book we embark on a thrilling quest to unearth the lost secrets of the Beja Tonga, an ancient civilization of Africa shrouded in mystery. One aim of this book is to answer the question: Is "Tsonga" a recent invention or a whisper from a forgotten era? I here forth unravel the enigmatic origins of this word and its hidden connection to the Tonga people of southern Mozambique.

The Tsonga people in South Africa and Mozambique were referred to as the 'Thonga people' in missionary texts from the late 1800s to early 1900s. This term, popularized by missionaries like Henri A. Junod, was seen to describe the language spoken by various tribes residing in southern Mozambique and along the Indian Ocean coast.

Other names used for the Tsonga in older literature include 'Landins', 'Magouamba' (Magwamba), or simply 'Tonga'.

In South African territory the Tsonga Language Committee supposedly opted to refine this term 'Tonga' and 'Thonga' into what is today known as 'Tsonga', apparently, "to expurgate the derogatory connotations from the term" (Harries, 1983:334). References to the Tsonga or Thonga would draw even the avid investigator to assume a different historical background of all associated groups of the Tsonga from what has been described as the Tonga. It would indeed not be mistaken to attribute Henri A. Junod as the grand architect in popularising what came to be known in literature as the 'Thonga tribe'. In reference to the origin of this term for the tribe it would not be false, either, to accept that Junod had come to acquire this name, or something sounding very similar to it, from among the population of tribes that he had been tasked with studying. Junod (1912:15) who is often speculated by modern critics to have come up with the term 'Tsonga' states, himself, emphatically that "the Thonga of the Northern Clans, especially those of the Bilen and Djonga groups, like to call themselves Tjonga, the Hlengwe Tsonga. This word is perhaps originally the same as Ronga and may have meant also people of the East, although the R of the Ronga dialect does not permute regularly in Tj and Ts in the Northern clans". This statement from someone

who studied the people and their language in depth indicates that the term Tsonga (with an 's') originates from a particular dialect in the Tsonga language group, particularly the Hlengwe dialect.

Scholars from various disciplines, including anthropology, linguistics, and history, have explored and documented the rich cultural heritage of the Tsonga people, contributing to a deeper understanding of their history, language, and contemporary realities. Vail (1989:85) revises both modern and older historical narratives concerning Tonga identity in particular, proposing a theory suggesting that 'Tonga' might have been the self-designation used by the original inhabitants of the East coast before various "Bantu" groups migrated into the region. However, Vail (1989:85) notes that the term became contentious among some Nguni populations, who used it imprecisely. Eventually, even European colonists began referring to the coastal people of Natal as 'amaThonga', with linguists and missionaries adding an aspirated 'h' to match the Nguni pronunciation. The colonial period, as with other African groups, had a profound impact on the Tsonga people and their identity. Colonial policies often imposed external labels and classifications on indigenous groups, reshaping how they were perceived and categorized by outsiders. Only in the 20th century did linguists replace the 'h' in 'Thonga' with an 's', drawing from the speech patterns of the Hlengwe dialect,

leading to the official recognition of the term Tsonga in the constitutional setting of South Africa (Vail, 1989:85). Prior to the local adoption of the term 'Tsonga' in South Africa, Harries (1983:334) notes that the inhabitants of western Inhambane referred to the Gitonga language as 'isi-Tsonga', and Junod also wrote of the Tonga people of Inhambane as "the Tsongas of Inhambane". This posed challenges for missionaries who struggled to distinguish one group from another. Referring to one of the early scholars of the Tsonga language, Henri Berthoud, Harries (1983:334) asserts that 'Tsonga' was a term Berthoud ultimately linked to the South African group to denote a geographical location, signifying 'southern', though this assertion is not valid as it contradicts the correct Tsonga term for 'South', which is actually 'Dzonga'. Henri Berthoud's linguistic classifications including Tonga and Tsonga were not entirely novel. Frederick Elton, who explored the lower Limpopo in 1871, asserted that the entire region stretching from north of Zululand to the Buzi River was inhabited by the Amatongas, who "resembled each other in manners and custom (and) variation in dialect" (Elton, 1872). The political landscape of Southern Africa, including the formation of nation-states and administrative boundaries, further influenced the strengthening of Tsonga identity. This includes interactions with neighboring ethnic groups and the negotiation of territorial and



cultural boundaries. Overall, the story of the Tsonga people is one of resilience, adaptation, and ongoing cultural vibrancy in the face of historical challenges and contemporary changes. Their experiences shed light on broader themes of identity, language, and cultural heritage in the African context, and this gives strong reason to investigate the relationship between the modern Tsonga identity and the ancient Tonga identity.

During the 1600s to the late 1800s, some Tsonga people residing in the eastern part of what is now the Limpopo province referred to themselves as Vatonga (Ba-Tonga in old maps) and their land as '*vutonga*' (Berthoud, 1884). Government records from 1935 also documented the traditional leaders of the present Tsonga people in the modern-day Limpopo province as the 'Tonga' before the establishment of the Gazankulu Bantustan (Van Warmelo, 1935). Later, the term was refined to include an 's', in line with the Hlengwe dialect of Xitswa, similar to the dialectic shift observed with the Vatswa, who were often referred to as the 'Vatwa/Vatua' where the 's' was omitted.

Regardless of the complicated history surrounding the term, this book delves into the origins of the terms 'Tsonga' and 'Thonga', tracing them back to the original term 'Tonga', which was identified

in the southern regions of Mozambique before being adopted in South Africa as 'Tsonga'. As outlined in this book, Harries' theory (1983:333) on the ancient usage of the term in Mozambique provides valuable insights into the early settlement history of the country. The evolution of ethnic and cultural identities, as reflected in the shifting terms used to describe groups like the Tsonga people, often mirrors complex historical and social processes. Colonial encounters, linguistic exchanges, and migrations have all contributed to the evolving nature of identity formation in southern Africa.

The term 'Tonga' has a variety of meanings in different languages, though a predominant narrative in the past, among certain groups, seems to have had derogatory association. This kind of narrative is similar in its one-sided view of terminology as is commonly the case against the groups identified with the term 'Shona' as being associated with the Nguni meaning for death; the Karangas who have been associated with the term M'Holi (slave) by the Ndebeles; and the term 'Venda' being associated with the Portuguese translation referring to 'sale'.

Among the diverse African interpretations of the term Tonga, '*ku tonga*' in Xitsonga and '*hu tonga*' in Tshivenda connote pridefulness, cheekiness, or boasting. In isiZulu, 'umThonga' or 'iThonga' can refer

to a spirit medium or simply a stick. Additionally, the phrase '*kutonga*' in the Shona language signifies 'to govern' or 'to rule' (Le Roux, 1999:105), where '*mutonga*' consequently denotes a 'ruler' or 'governor'. Furthermore, the term 'Tonga' is also used to describe a type of saline soil found in parts of Mozambique and elsewhere (Ministry for the Coordination of Environmental Affairs, 2009:15). In the Xilenge dialect of Chopi in southern Mozambique, '*Vutonga*' directly translates to 'the east' (Smyth & Matthews, 1902:42), which aligns with the meaning of *Vuronga* (also meaning east) in the Ronga language. Earthy (1933) also documents in her book that the word "*Vutsonga*" among the Lenge and Chopi people of southern Mozambique holds the same meaning of 'East', and in those parts Vutsonga also refers to the land of the Chopi and Tonga people. To depict the conditions in southern Mozambique prior to the arrival of the Nguni, an oral tradition collected by Dora Earthy (1933:3) from Johane Makamu indicates: "Starting long ago, when the VaNgoni had not yet arrived, the VaTsopi and VaLenge had been one race from very old indeed... when they see each other, they call each other by the direction of the winds, like this: on the side of the west, they call it VuLenge, while all are of one race. Seeing the side of the east, they call it VuTsonga, and this means VuTshopi".

Another term relevant to the aim of this book is the term 'Beja'. In some historical documents, for instance, Tolmacheva (1986:106) suggests that the Beja are an ancient group in Africa. The term is associated with other well-known African terms that some readers may recognize. The term 'Zanj' has frequently appeared in historical literature, often raising curiosity regarding its relationship with East African populations. Tolmacheva (1986:106) observes that the Zanj are a group among an ancient Ethiopian-related population, sometimes referred to in Arabic literature as Al-Habasha, which encompasses the Zanj, the Nubians, the Abyssinians, and the Beja. From notes by Levi (2012:4), it appears present-day Ethiopia, Eritrea, and northern Somalia were known as Bilād Al-Habashah to the Arabs, a term which means "the land of the amber-skinned Africans". According to Tolmacheva (1986:106), the Zanj are distinct from Al-Habasha as Abyssinians, yet they are considered part of Al-Habasha, equivalent to the Ethiopians of ancient times. The term 'Beja' thus holds significance in historical documents, suggesting an ancient group in Africa. It is associated with these other well-known African terms, indicating a complex historical lineage.

With archaeological studies and radiocarbon dating from 270-460 A.D. revealing evidence of early Iron-Age societies producing iron and copper in what later became the Transvaal, believed to be ancestors

of present Bantu-speaking people (Mason, 1974:211), it is both academically significant and intriguing to explore the connection between early south-eastern trade and the migration of African people towards southern Africa. Uncovering the ancient truths associated with the Beja Tonga, particularly their subtle historical presence in various parts of southern Africa, is not only a scholarly endeavour but also holds philosophical value.

Based on historical narratives and oral traditions, the terms ‘Tonga’ and ‘Beja’ are historically linked with a modern Tsonga-speaking group of the Van’wanati clan who identify as a main part of the ancient Beja Tonga (Maluleke, 2013). However, these terms are not solely associated with this group but also with ancient geographic locations in certain parts of southern Africa where large-scale trading operations with connections to distant places such as Asia were conducted. This book aims to disseminate historical narratives about the origins of the Tonga people, shedding light on the ancient and significant dynastic period of the Beja Tonga in southern Africa.

## **Tracing the Early Migrations in Africa**

In the 'Encyclopedia of African Religion' the Tonga people of Zambia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe are spoken of in terms of a common origin, where they are said to have come from an area in the north-eastern part of Africa in ancient times (Asante & Mazama, 2009:112). Various African groups may have faced a great amount of pressure from the north-eastern parts of Africa where challenges from raids by northern Arab groups or shortage of water at the Nile or Great Lakes had forced the many great tribes of the areas to migrate towards the south. Regions including Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and other parts now dominated by Arab influence are perhaps the primary evidence of the early displacement of African groups from those parts. Separate groups of Arabs came through Egypt and other directions, essentially dominating the northern parts of Sudan, mixing and assimilating into the local populations while moving in small waves to other parts of the country (Akol Ruay, 1994:14). Arab groups blending in with local people, especially in Sudan, shows how different ethnic and cultural groups mixed in north-eastern Africa. The raid mentality that had flourished during the early periods between 200 A.D. and 900 A.D., with a subsequent invasion of Africa by the Romans, had a lasting impact that had certainly spilled over to

as far as the southern parts of Mozambique. References to raids and invasions, including those by the Romans, indicate the broader historical context of conflict and interaction between African societies and external powers.

The northern part of the Mozambican coast including the Mozambican Island that is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site was an epicentre of trade with merchants from as far as China, India, Persia, and Indonesia (Duarte, 2012:2). A hallmark of the domineering aspect of large bands of Asian travellers and traders, the vast trading columns along the east coast of Africa are a case in point to indicate the impact of very early foreign involvement in African society. The Mozambican Island, known for trade, shows how crucial sea trade routes were on Africa's east coast. It points out how African societies were global early on, trading and sharing culture with faraway places like China, India, Persia, and Indonesia.

Hall (1909:66) writes about an early 915 A.D. Asian traveller, Massoude or Al-Mas'udi, who had encountered a group called the Wak-Wak (or Waq-Waq), a group of natives believed to have been early bushmen populations in southern Mozambique, who had been forced to migrate South by one group of the oncoming Africans identified as part of the "Bantu". Hall (1909:66) adds a reference to

an old map by a different Asian traveller, Al-Idrisi, in the twelfth century that points to the land of the Wak-Wak having been located South of Sofala, and also a bit further South of Cape Corrientes/Correntes (Cap des Courans), which indicates a location within the Inhambane Bay up till the Delagoa Bay, an area that has for a long time been largely occupied by groups of the Vatonga (Tonga people). The Wak-Wak are described as a group of hunter-gatherers who used darts and bows to hunt for wild animals and were much accustomed to fruits and agricultural pursuits, and who migrated regularly with the seasons (Hall, 1909:66). Descriptions of the Wak-Wak as hunter-gatherers skilled in agriculture and seasonal migration offer insights into their lifestyle and adaptation strategies. This information helps reconstruct their socio-economic practices and relationship with the environment they lived in. The Karangas of Mashonaland had also attributed some of the rock paintings in their regions to these groups of the Wak-Wak (Hall, 1909:66). The attribution of rock paintings to the Wak-Wak in Mashonaland suggests their cultural influence and artistic legacy in the region. Identified as “bushmen”, these Wak-Wak may have been an ancestral group of the Tonga or the Chopi group of people who are today resided along the coast of southern Mozambique in the south of Sofala, or may have been a very early hunter-gatherer group who



the Tonga people had found already settled in the region and associated with the groups they termed the Vatswa (Tswa people). Studying these links can help us see how cultures have stayed the same or changed over the years. Being historically traced to the region around Inhambane (Hall, 1909:84), the Wak-Wak are the earliest group of Africans to feature in the attained records in connection with the indigenous history of Mozambique. The fact that historical records mention the Wak-Wak as one of the earliest African groups in Mozambique shows how important they were in forming the area's original history. They later lived alongside the Zanj (who also included the Beja Tonga), showing how Mozambique has been home to these African societies since ancient times.

In Hall's work (1909:84) an assumption is made that "Bantu tribes" had not penetrated the region South of the Zambezi before 700 or 800 A.D., while with regards to the Tonga people of Quiteve, Gengenbach (2017:429) suggests that Tonga ancestors had settled in the area (Quiteve) from the fourth century on, which is an earlier time period than that suggested by Hall (1909:84) pertaining to "Bantu" migrations south of the Zambezi River. One other of the attained scientific research papers shows that ancestors of present Bantu-speaking people were producing iron and copper in what later became the Transvaal in today's South Africa at some time during

270-460 A.D (Mason, 1974:211). This discrepancy highlights the complexity of “Bantu” migration patterns and the need for interdisciplinary approaches to reconstructing African history.

The name ‘Wak-Wak’, however it may have been pronounced by the Arabs during Massoude's time, in a local and indigenous way sounds to be a corruption of the name ‘Kwa-Kwa’. When said very quickly, one who is not fairly trained in a native tongue may mispronounce the name, especially when said to a foreign traveller. Of particular interest, kwakwa is a name that features as an African name used in different forms of reference in southern Africa, one of which Kwakwa is an old name for the Quilimane River that is a tributary of the Zambezi (Hall, 1909:446), and is also a name that refers to an indigenous fruit known as *nkwakwa* (*strychnos madagascariensis*) that likes to grow in the region within Inhambane and further down towards the regions of KwaZulu Natal. Today it also refers to the name of a particular tribe who identify as the Makwakwa who are settled, interestingly, in the region just south of Cape Corrientes below Inhambane Bay and are today associated with the Chopi or local Tonga/Thonga people. This outlook gives light to that period in time where the “Bantu” people themselves could very well have been referred to as bushmen, given that ‘Bantu’ in itself translates to ‘people’ in as much as it is evidence of the bush life that African

people lived that would not distinguish them from the stereotypical "bushman" as perceived by Asian and European travellers. This challenges Eurocentric narratives of African history and emphasizes the need to reconsider preconceived notions of identity and culture. To add to this, it is worth noting the conflicting aspect of how the early Tswa-speaking folks were labelled by the Tsonga people. When the Tsonga arrived at their current homes in southern Mozambique, they encountered what we now know as the Vatswa (Tswa people), mainly those who referred to themselves as Makwakwa, a name that seems to have been miswritten as "Wakwak" in those early Arab records. The Tsonga people called them Vatswa to distinguish them as "hunter-gatherers" or pygmies (Webster, 1976). They are the ancestors of many in the Tswa, N'wanati, and Hlengwe clans, either directly or through intermarriage and assimilation.

James Mullan (1969) largely disregards the substantial role of the indigenous Africans in the founding of Zimbabwe, where the title of his book even proclaims Arabs to have been those responsible for the founding of the great state. This highlights the importance of critically examining historical narratives and recognizing the agency of local populations in shaping their own destinies. Mullan (1969:86) however goes on to make an analysis of the indigenous Wak-Wak from Al-Idrisi's records, acknowledging that the Wak-Wak, who are

derogatorily described by Idrisi as “hideous aboriginals whose speech resembles whistling”, may be descriptive of a group speaking the language of the modern Chopi people. This description demonstrates the importance of critically interpreting historical records, considering biases and perspectives of the authors while matching the historical descriptions to modern group characteristics. Despite those biases by Mullan and Al-Idrisi, the analysis suggests linguistic similarities between the Wak-Wak and modern Chopi people, hinting at potential cultural and ancestral connections. By examining multiple sources and perspectives, we can construct more accurate and nuanced narratives of the past. The Chopi people (Copi/Tjopi) are an ethnic group predominantly living in southern Mozambique, particularly in the Inhambane Province. They are renowned for their musical traditions, including the *ngodo* performances featuring the *timbila* xylophone orchestras. Both the Tswa and Tsonga languages have a very dominant whistled fricative in speech, which has been passed on to the southern-most groups of the Chopi people. The descriptions of the bushmen found by the Arabs around the area of Sofala and further areas in around 1150 A.D., however old and unreliable, do give some credit to suggest that the Wak-Wak had been an early ancestral group of the Chopi, or perhaps, directly, ancestors of the group of people who adopted the name Kwakwa in

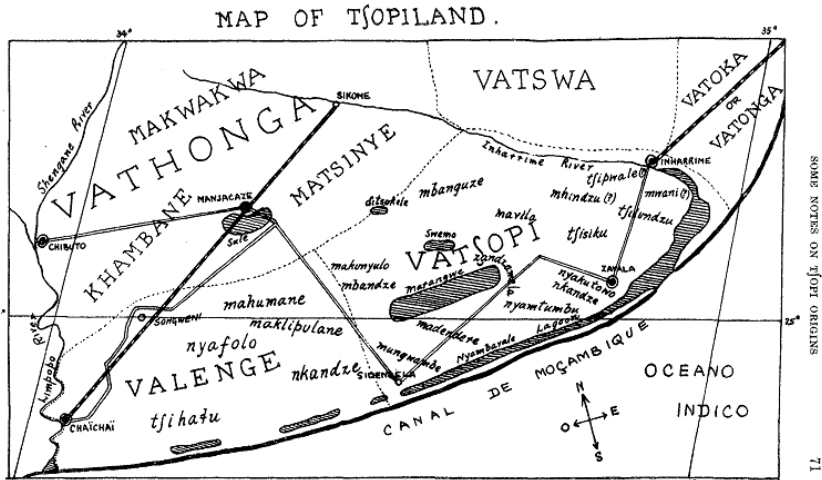
that region, who are today associated with Tswa, Chopi and Lenge identity and share a long history with the Tonga people of southern Mozambique. If not directly related to the Wak-Wak, then the Makwakwa groups are by far the best and closest groups to have assimilated or subsumed into the Wak-Waks. The history of settlement and historical descriptions are very telling. Thinking about how the documented Wak-Wak are ancestors of the Chopi or closely linked to the Makwakwa groups shows how complicated ethnic identities and movements are in southern Africa. This invites further research into genetic, linguistic, and archaeological evidence to support or refute these hypotheses.

Earthy (1933:6) offers some valuable insights from her long stay with the Lenge people, diving into the long history of the Makwakwa who identified themselves as the most ancient of the Lenge people (Valenge):

The Kwakwi are ancient people who were scattered about the country. They lived in one place after another where a person sees ash heaps. It was they who built long ago, and were very rich. They were scattered by the people who are in the country now.

One of the Kwakwi women living at Masiyeni told me that the Kwakwi were scattered remnants of the Makwakwa, hence the change in the name.

Based on my findings, it seems the Makwakwa group were among the earliest Tswa groups (VATSWA) encountered by the first wave of the Tonga people in southern Mozambique. Today, they are also considered part of the Valenge/Lenge and Chopi groups (Earthy, 1933). The Makwakwa, also including the Kwakwi, were ancient hunter-gatherers who relied on bows and arrows for hunting. According to Webster (1976), the term Vatswa was used by the old Tsonga people to refer to "native hunter-gatherers" or "pygmies". The use of bows and arrows is quite common in ancient African society, as these forms of weaponry were also favoured in northern regions such as Ethiopia and the entire Cushitic region in general. The Tonga people could have already been using bows and arrows when they encountered the Tswa people in the south, and it seems their mastery of these weapons was enriched in their encounters with other groups in regions where they settled.



(Image source: Junod, 1927. Map of Chopiland/Tjopiland)

Chigwedere (2016) brings some salvation to the early history of the Great Zimbabwe State, identifying three tribes – the Dau Beja Tonga, the Dziva Hungwe Kalanga, and the Nyai Soko – who migrated from a north-eastern part of Africa to eventually form what is known today as Zimbabwe. Chigwedere's terming of the tribes appears to include the totem and the tribal name, such as Dau (for lion) in the Beja Tonga, and Soko (for Baboon) in the Nyai tribe. Being an academic source acquired that directly mentions the term 'Beja Tonga', the work ultimately details with substantial precision much of the historical makings of the groups Vatonga (Tonga), Vakalanga (Kalanga), and Vanyai (Nyai). By tracing the migration patterns and

historical narratives of these groups, Chigwedere sheds light on the complex processes that shaped the development of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The origin story of Chigwedere's Beja-Tonga account is found to resemble the oral history of the Beja Tonga of the Maluleke group (Maluleke, 2013). The parallels between Chigwedere's (2016) account and Maluleke's (2013) oral history of the Beja Tonga highlight the importance of multiple sources in reconstructing historical narratives. By corroborating oral traditions with academic research, scholars can develop more comprehensive and accurate accounts of past events and movements.

Whatever the connection may be between those documented as the Wak-Wak and the Tonga people who now inhabit southern Mozambique, it is evident that the history between the groups comes to converge on a basis of shared settlement and contact, and this is useful in discerning the relationship between the historical times and the modern people groups by analysing the settlement patterns and associated narratives. Exploring the past connections among various ethnic groups gives us important clues about the cultural heritage and identities of today's communities. Knowing the historical origins of these groups helps us understand current social interactions better and encourages us to value the diverse cultures in the area.



By analysing settlement patterns and associated narratives, researchers can better understand the dynamics of interaction and cultural exchange among different groups over time. Among all the 'Tonga' languages in Africa, the one that seems closest to Xitsonga, Xitswa, and Xicopi is called "Shinyembane" in Mozambique's Inhambane province. This language, commonly known as Gitonga, is an ancient form related to Chopi. It was greatly affected by Persian and Portuguese interaction, and the culture of its speakers was also somewhat influenced by Semitic customs. Gitonga can be described as an ancient form of Chopi, suggesting historical and linguistic connections between these languages. The influence of Persian and Portuguese languages on Gitonga indicates centuries of cultural exchange and interaction in the region. Rita-Ferreira (1959:58), in referring to Dr. Elsdon-Dew and a serological study, mentions that "the Chopi and the Khokhas [Tonga] are the most primitive Black race investigated by him and that their ancestors belonged to the first wave of Bantu people to enter this region", referring specifically to the Tonga and Chopi people of southern Mozambique. The Tongas of Inhambane were also called "*Vocica/Vacica*" (meaning 'the traders'), highlighting their historical role as traders and merchants in the area. This nickname emphasizes the economic and commercial importance of the Tonga people in local trade networks. They are an ancient

group who were skilled traders and hunters, and much of their history is lost in the "grey areas of history" before it was properly recorded in writing.

An important narrative that is associated with the history of the Wak-Wak is that of the group described as the 'Zanj' (sometimes spelled as Zenj, Zeng, or Zinj). The big question is who were the Zanj and where did they come from? Well, according to Tolmacheva (1986:105) the first traceable mention of the word 'Zanj' in Africa is from Al-Fazari, who lists Zanj as one of many African countries during the time 780s A.D. Tolmacheva (1986:106) claims that "according to tradition, the Zanj were descended from Noah through Kush son of Ham". This belief comes from a family tree mentioned by Al-Ya'qubi, who lived around 897 A.D. So, in this view, the Zanj are considered one of Kush's descendants. They migrated south, separating from some of their relatives who headed west. This movement suggests how African populations have moved over thousands of years. References to Al-Fazari and Al-Ya'qubi give a historical background on the Zanj, dating back to the 780s A.D. These early mentions help us understand the Zanj's presence and influence in ancient African societies. Scholar Velez Grilo (1958) connects the Beja tribes to ancient African kingdoms like Nubia and Kush, perhaps showing their old historical ties and contributions to those early African societies.

Mentioning Kush and Noah's lineage can be seen as part of a broader religious history, where many modern nations can trace their descent from those ancient civilizations. On the contrast, it could symbolise the people as the indigenous inhabitants of the land also known as Kush. This way, the Zanj and Beja's connection to this history is not unique to the genealogical traces of human history, but helps us trace the origins of African groups who are related to the old Ethiopians and Cushitic people of the ancient cultures. Religious history is often debated, and linking the Beja Tonga to Cushitic history in this case can hopefully give more insight on African history and the migration of people from one place to another.

In contrast to those identifications of the first use of the word 'Zanj' in Africa, Hall (1909:66) mentions that 'Zenj' or 'Zeng' was first mentioned by Ptolemy, who used it to refer to a district in the eastern parts of Africa around the coastal area of Tanzania in the region known as Zanzibar, which was formally known as Zangebar (Bar-ez-Zeng). In Hall's descriptions (1909:66), alternatively 'Zeng' is a Persian word that signifies "land of the blacks", suggesting an ethnic or racial connotation associated with the term. Hall (1909:66) also refers to Massoude's remarks on the Sea of Zeng that carries a strong current towards the coast of Mozambique. The Sea of Zeng is therefore identified as that part in the area of the sea of Zanzibar

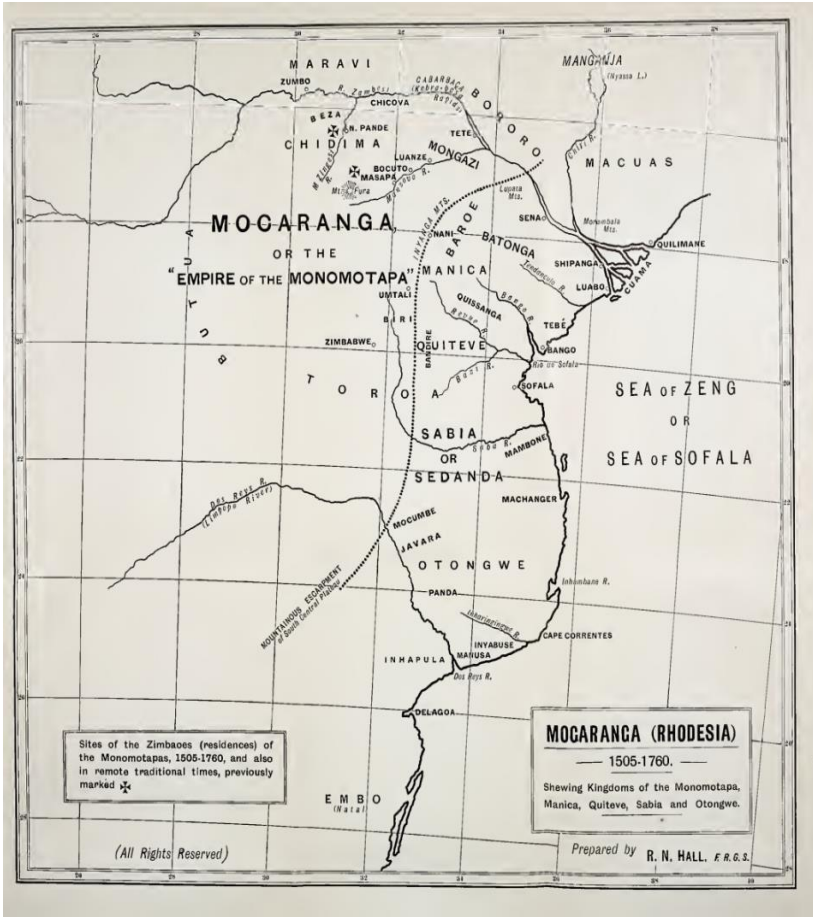
stretching towards the northern parts of Madagascar and further along the coastal areas of Mozambique. It is the part of the Indian Ocean that washes onto the coastal land of Tanzania and stretches towards the northern parts of Madagascar, and which further washes along the coastal areas of Mozambique. This geographical reference helps place the historical context of the Zeng people and gives an idea of those early groups of settlers in south-eastern Africa. Hall (1909:70) subsequently identifies the Zeng as a group of the “Bantu” who were recorded in Massoude’s writings, stating that just before 915 A.D. these Zeng “Bantus” had come from the north to eventually settle along the coast of Mozambique at Sofala. The Zeng are further described as joyful and light-hearted people, bearing these traits that explorers distinguished from other “Bantu” people (Hall, 1909:415). The Zeng from Hall (1909), who makes reference to Massoude’s records, appeared at the southern part of Mozambique at a later stage than those identified as the Wak-Wak. The Zeng seem to have been a group of early African migrants who came from the north-eastern parts of Africa and found the Wak-Wak already living in the south, and either incorporated or forced the Wak-Wak to migrate to other areas. Through geographical identification and physical descriptions, it is evident that the ‘Zanj’ spoken of by Tolmacheva (1986) and the ‘Zeng’ from Hall’s (1909) accounts, in relation to a

people group, are one and the same group of people, though the spelling of the name differs in this case. Both descriptions also refer to the same locality and time period. The Zeng in the old history books are seemingly the earliest documented groups of the African “Bantu” tribes that migrated down South towards what later became Mozambique in that early period. It is through these narratives that a connection is established in relation to the Beja group, who are indicated in some of the historical sources to have been kinfolk to the Zeng/Zanj people (Tolmacheva, 1986:106). The connection between the Zeng or Zanj people and the Beja group indicates a broader network of cultural and ethnic interactions in ancient Africa, which correlates with other research mentioning the Tonga people of Inhambane in southern Mozambique as the earliest groups of the “Bantu” to have migrated to those southern parts of Africa (Rita-Ferreira, 1959:58).

## First Settlements in Southern Africa

Duarte (2012:5) gives his account of the Zanj, making an analysis of the early raids by Austronesian people who had travelled to Madagascar and were involved in trade with the Chinese. The Austronesian people raided as well for slaves in eastern Africa in the town of Qanbalu and pillaged through the land of Sofala in Mozambique. Sofala itself had also been referred to as the land of the Zanj (Duarte, 2012:5). Duarte's account highlights the involvement of Austronesian people in trade and slave raids in eastern Africa, particularly in Sofala, which suggests the region's significance in the Indian Ocean trade network and the complex interactions between different maritime cultures during this period. Al-Idrisi on the other hand identifies three early Zanj settlements: 'Malindi' (or Malinde), 'Manbasa' (or Mombasa/Mumbasa), and 'Al-Banas' (or Al-Banes) (Tolmacheva, 1996:193), the first two being identifiable on the coastal land of Africa on the east of Tanzania facing the Island of Zanzibar. Al-Banas and Sofala are stated to have shared boundaries, where Sofala is said to start just south of Al-Banas, as Al-Banas joins with the land of Waq-Waq in the south (Tolmacheva, 1996:193). These locations are spoken of more descriptively in Theal's book (1902:268-270). According to further

descriptions of the early settlements of the Zanj, in Heidi Gengenbach's paper (2017), the Tonga people of Sofala during the period of the reign of the king of Quiteve (Kiteve) had become vassals of this king who is said to have been the richest and most powerful ruler in the region. The Tonga people's association with Sofala and Quiteve's kingdom sheds light on the region's geopolitical dynamics during those times. The Tonga's vassalage under Quiteve suggests their role within the broader political landscape of Sofala and their interaction with neighbouring polities. Gengenbach (2017:429) shows that the early ancestors of the Tonga people had settled in this region of Sofala beginning from the fourth century onwards, being one of the earliest historical traces of settlement of north-eastern migrating tribes in southern Africa and aligns directly with the history of the Zanj who settled in Sofala and the land of the Wak-Wak. The identification with Quiteve and Sofala as early settlement is with reference to the same geographic location as that spoken of in terms of the historical Zanj, an additional link of the Tonga being closely associated with Zanj history. Recognizing Sofala as a Zanj settlement adds another connection between the Tonga people and the wider Zanj history, indicating how ethnic identities and historical stories can be closely connected in Africa's past.



(Image source: Hall, 1909. Vutonga is indicated as OTONGWE in southern Mozambique)



The Tonga people are known to have also occupied what is known as the kingdom of Manica (Manika/Manhica) in the Massikessi district (Masikesi), as well as the kingdom of Baroe (Barwe) found between the Zambezi and Manica (Hall, 1909:390-391). This region, which included the Nyanga mountains, likely served as a strategic and cultural centre for the Tonga community. Manica was a significant polity in the region, known for its economic activities, including trade in gold and other commodities. These were the kingdoms closest to the Mutapa sphere of influence and that were both occupied by the early Tonga people. The Tonga people were also found to inhabit the coastline stretching from the Zambezi delta all the way to the mouth of the Limpopo River to the south (Hall, 1909:390-391). Tonga inhabitation along the coastline from the Zambezi delta to the mouth of the Limpopo River indicates their history of presence in especially the coastal areas. This suggests their engagement in maritime activities, trade, and interactions with other coastal communities.

In the south of Mozambique, the Tonga people had kingdoms in the land of Otongue (pronounced Tongwe/Tonge) that was historically found situated between Cape Corrientes and the Limpopo River (Hall, 1909:390-391). These kingdoms were already inhabited by the Tonga long before the Portuguese arrived. This emphasizes the pre-existing history and ongoing presence of the Tonga in the region. The

kingdom of Otongue, located in the southern part of Mozambique between Cape Corrientes and the Limpopo River, further portrays the extent of Tonga territorial control. Otongue likely played a crucial role in the Tonga's economic and political networks, and the existence of smaller independent kingdoms under this nomenclature makes it seem to have been somewhat of a decentralized empire that was part of a cluster of other Tonga kingdoms and chieftaincies at Manica, Quiteve, Baroe, and Sena before the period of the 1500s.

The Tonga people of southern Mozambique dominated the Inhambane region, parts of Sofala and the region of the kingdom of Quiteve (Hall, 1909:463), and the people can still be found to inhabit these areas today. The fact that the Tonga people were prominent in areas like Inhambane, Sofala, and the kingdom of Quiteve shows how long they've been there and how much they've influenced southern Mozambique. These areas likely served as centres of political, economic, and cultural activity for the vast groups of Tonga people.

From Hall's indications (1909:464), in the vicinity of the Sacumbe mountains was a fortification belonging to the chief Marenga, whose lands lay on the northern part of the river between the rapids of Tete. The presence of fortifications belonging to Chief Marenga near the Sacumbe Mountains suggests the strategic importance of these

areas in the history of the Tonga people in the vicinity of Tete. These fortifications seem to have served as defensive structures and administrative centres, indicating the organization and territorial control of those particular Tonga people. In some dialects, such as with Karanga and Kalanga, the dialect sound shifts between the 'L' and the 'R' where a term such as 'Malenga' would also be pronounced as 'Marenga'. Marenga or Malenga are forms of the same name that remarkably appear in various sources denoting an ancient historical ancestor who features among both the Tonga and Shona groups of people.

The language that was spoken by the Tonga people towards the coast of Mozambique is however different from Karanga and is thought to have developed into what is today known as the Chopi language, also known as Ndonge (Liesegang, 2014a:27). This linguistic evolution likely occurred over centuries, influenced by various cultural and historical factors. When the Portuguese were in the area of what was then the kingdom of Tongwe (Otongue) around 1560, a clear distinction could be made between the Karanga (identified as "immigrants") and the Butonga (identified as the "locals"). This difference highlights how diverse the ethnic groups are in the area and confirms that the Tonga people were earlier residents. The Tonga people were also referred to as the Tonge and Ndonge (Theal,

1902:6). As indicated by these historical references, the Tonga people were already living along the coast of Mozambique before other “Bantu” groups such as the Karanga and Nguni arrived in the area and they were referred to as Tonga, indicating a validity in the hypothesis by Harries (1983:333) that “the original inhabitants of the east coast were called Tonga before the immigration into the area of various Nguni and Shona-speaking groups some time before the 16th century”. References to the Tonga people living along the coast before the arrival of other “Bantu” groups like the Nguni suggest their early settlement in the region. The use of terms like Tonga, Tonge, and Ndonge to describe the local population indicates their long history of identity politics through their relationship with other ancient African groups, and can give better suggestions to more informed readers about their presence and identity in the coastal areas.



(Image source: Alpers 1970)

In one version of the history of Zimbabwe, the Mutapa state is said to have emerged after the fall of Great Zimbabwe, after which the remnants of the establishment went on to conquer the Tavara and other people of Tonga ancestry to eventually fall under the political sway of the Zhou/Samanyanga ruled by Nyatsimba Mutota (Alphin,

1980:2). In the northwest of the region, other remnants of Great Zimbabwe assimilated the Kalanga people of the Leopard's Kopje culture, which led to the establishment of the Torwa Dynasty under the kingdom of Khami.

The Ziwa ruins in the Nyanga District of Zimbabwe, in Hall's view (1909:191), were once the home of the early Tonga people in that part of the country. At some point in the early 1900s colonial period, the Ziwa ruins were called the 'van Niekerk ruins,' a name that could lead to confusion about their origin. This highlights why it's crucial to preserve and acknowledge the historical importance of these sites. The Nyanga Ziwa ruins are considered to be the oldest structural remains in that part of Africa (Hall, 1909:191). The Portuguese, upon arriving, found Tonga people to be occupying these lands of Nyanga, indicating the ancient history of Tonga communities in the area (Hall, 1909:155). The term Monomotapa is apparently a mispronunciation by the Portuguese derived from the Tonga-given expression '*Mwene Mutapa*' (Levi, 2012:4), and gives indications of the linguistic and cultural misidentification of many parts of the history of the region. Levi (2012:4) adds that it originated as a nickname by the conquered Tonga, given to the Karanga chief, Mutota, during the period of conquest in the fifteenth century, therefore identifying him as master of the ravaged lands. *Mwene* would mean master, ruler, or owner,

and *Mutapa* would refer to land. This would show how much the Tonga people influenced the history of the Mutapa Empire. It also shows how power, conquest, and sharing culture were all connected in southern Africa's past. It might also be a name from the Shona language, given by the people who were conquered. There are many ideas about where the name comes from and what it means, but the Shona explanation seems to be more widespread and accepted.

The Beja, also referred to as 'Buja', are associated with the Zanj people who migrated into Mozambique from the eastern parts of Africa (Tolmacheva, 1986:106). Tolmacheva (1986:106) makes a connection of these people to the Nubians and Abyssinians who are frequently associated with the Zanj, and as indicated, these Zanj are thought to have been a "Bantu" group (dark-skinned Africans). It may be a difficult task to track precisely when the term Zanj first came into use, however it is supposed that the term was first used by Persians and Arabs at a very early time to refer to a group of early inhabitants who settled in the area stretching from Zanzibar to the far reaches of southern Mozambique at a time that preceded European settlement and dominated by Asian trade (Tolmacheva, 1986:113). This supposition, however, may be brought into more perspective by a different source that makes reference to the Zanj being one and the same group of the Senzi who possessed the sacred

drum known as *ngoma lungundu*, and who were displaced from their land and forced to push into the area of what is known as Sena near the area where the Zambezi flows (Le Roux, 1999:121).

One finding of interest is that the language of the people of Sena, an area that has for a long time been dominated by the Batonga, has been found to have idioms that are very close to Xitsonga which is the language spoken by the Tsonga people (Berthoud, 1884:50-55). In Velez Grilo's work (1958:116) an alternative spelling is used, 'Zindj', seemingly to refer to the same group of the Zanj or Zeng. His discussion on the Lemba people (Vhalemba) mentions Al-Massoude's records and further links the Bedja (Beja) to the ancient empire of Kush (as children of Kush), as Velez Grilo states (1958:116) that the Zindj "together with the Bedjah and the Nubians" migrated to various directions, some heading westwards and some heading South after breaking apart from the Cushitic region. Various sources provide different perspectives on the origins and movements of the Zanj people, with a somewhat consistent underlying theme. While Tolmacheva (1986) suggests that the Zanj migrated into Mozambique from regions stretching from Zanzibar to southern Mozambique, Le Roux (1999) mentions the displacement of the Senzi people, who are considered synonymous with the Zanj, linking them to the area near the Zambezi River at Sena. What is ascertained in relation to the Beja



Tonga is that the Beja people are associated with the Zanj, a term used by Persians and Arabs to refer to dark-skinned African groups, and that these people share a history of migration with the Lemba people who today consider themselves to have a history with Semitic culture. This association suggests shared cultural or historical ties between the Beja and the Zanj, to other groups such as the Nubians and Abyssinians (ancient Sudanese, Ethiopians, and Tanzanians) who are frequently mentioned alongside the Zanj in historical records. The findings also suggest that the Beja people migrated into Mozambique from eastern Africa, possibly originating from regions associated with the ancient empire of Kush. This migration likely occurred over a considerable period, involving movements and displacements of various ethnic groups.

Apart from 'Tonga' also being the name of a town in the West Bank of the Upper Nile region of South Sudan (Oliver & Atmore, 2001:142), the term 'Beja', which is associated with some of that nation's inhabitants, may elicit responses viewing any association of the "Bantu" with the nomadic Sudanese group of the modern Bejas as over presumptuous or perhaps that the Asian-looking Beja herders of today are unrelated with any of the black African groups. These diverse geographical references, however, may indicate the complexity of historical migrations and interactions between

different ethnic groups across Africa at a particular time that is incomprehensible to the modern era. To bring the matter towards a farther sub-Saharan locality, the name 'Beja' can be found in some records relating to the region just near the mountains of the Zoutpansberg (Soutpansberg) in the Limpopo province of South Africa. Beja in these parts near the Limpopo River used to be one of the old trading hubs, and was the trusted regional zone for trade between the interior and Inhambane or Lourenco Marques (Maputo) in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and an area that saw generations of settlement in and around the region (Khorommbi, 2001:35). On the outskirts of Beja today are found various settlements of the Tsonga and Venda people who have over the years moved and settled freely as far as where the political mood would allow. Das Neves (1878:143), a Portuguese hunter and explorer had in 1860 took on a hunting expedition into the Transvaal and was to eventually reach these lands he identified as Beja near the Zoutpensberg Mountain (mountain of the salt mine), during which time he also traversed through the place of João Albasini. Not surprisingly, the area between the town of Louis Trichardt or Makhado below the Zoutpansberg and the villages of Mpheni and Elim is still referred to as Beja, an area that is not far from the hills of Mtonga (*ka Mutonga*) just a short distance from the Swiss Mission church of Lemana. Beja

was still identified with this name by the government in around 1960 in reference to this land that had then been designated as a farming area (farm no. 39) under the Transvaal Provincial Government (The Province of Transvaal, 1960). This government designation indicates administrative decisions regarding land use and settlement patterns in the region during that time. These lands identified by Das Neves (1878) as the lands of Beja and the inhabitants as the Bejas, in different sections of the book, seem to have been associated with groups of the Tsonga people who were also settled in adjacent areas of Valdezia, with others and some groups of the Dau based at Mashau. The Beja Tonga people, who from an early point in time appear to have faced a significant amount of pressure and forced removals from the region, had very early settlements in these parts.

Regarding conflicts with powerful neighbouring states like Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe, historical accounts and archaeological findings support the existence of territorial disputes and power struggles in the region during the 13th century. These conflicts likely influenced the migration patterns and societal dynamics of the Beja Tonga people. It is argued that ancestral groups of the Tsonga people were already in the Limpopo valley in the period 1200-1300, during which time they may have faced heavy pressure from the Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe states and

forced to push southwards, and in Mozambique the Tonga who were based at Chiboene (Chibwene) as well faced heavy pressure and were driven towards Inhambane (Liesegang, 2014a:25). Liesegang (2014a:25) mentions the only available records of these early migrations being of groups of the Tembe, Chopi, and other sections of the Tonga of Nyamposse and Nyambe (Liesegang, 2014a:25). References to chiefs and distinct leadership structures in historical records align with findings from archaeological sites and oral traditions, which often mention the roles of local rulers and elites in governance and administration. Bernardo de Castro Soares provides a concise overview of the coastal and Chopi areas, focusing on certain chiefs located north of the Inharrime River. Specifically, Soares describes the region east of the Inhambane Bay, noting the presence of chiefs such as Chamba, Inhampossa, and Tempè (Liesegang, 2014b). Chamba is depicted as having had control over most of the Zavara coast, while Inhampossa governed several villages, and Tempè overseeing a small village near the trading post (Liesegang, 2014b). The fact that we have written records, like those from Bernardo de Castro Soares in 1729, shows how crucial historical sources are for understanding the social and political situation in southern Mozambique back then. Other lineages of the Gitonga-speaking people of Inhambane today, who are also found among the

Chopi and Tsonga, are the Makwakwa, Khambani, Vilankulu, Nyalungu, Nyambi, Nsumbane, and Masinga, among many others. The diversity of lineages within the Gitonga-speaking people, as mentioned above, is supported by linguistic studies and ethnographic research, which highlight the complex makeup of ethnic groups and communities in southern Mozambique (Liesegang, 2014b). These studies emphasize the rich cultural heritage and linguistic diversity of southern Mozambique, shaped by centuries of interaction and exchange among these ethnic groups.

Sources corroborate the existence of extensive trade networks among the Tonga people of Sofala and their interactions with neighbouring regions. For example, historical accounts and archaeological evidence support the notion of vibrant trade along the east-African coast, connecting inland regions like Sofala with trading centres such as Delagoa Bay (modern-day Maputo). This trade facilitated the exchange of goods such as gold, ivory, and cloth between the interior and coastal regions. In Evers' paper (1974:88) it is stated that the Tonga people of Sofala in Mozambique also traded with the people of 'Machicosse' who also had trade connections to Delagoa Bay during the period 1721-1730, which gives indications of a vast kingdom that depended substantially on trade within the parameters of the coast of Mozambique up to the reaches of the

Zoutpansberg (1974:88). Regarding the identification of early tribal settlements and lineages, various studies on Southern African history and anthropology provide additional insights. These sources often draw from archaeological findings, linguistic research, and oral traditions to trace the movements and interactions of the Tsonga people over time. While specific tribal names and affiliations may vary between studies, there is general agreement on the complex variety of tribal identities and the importance of kinship ties in shaping social structures. Paver (1933:605) traces the early settlement of tribes distortedly identified as the Paraotte, Machacosje, Chirindelle, and Inthowelle to a 1554 report by Perestrello who reported of these ancestral tribes who can today be linked to the tribes that are found settled in relatively the same areas, as remnants of the old settlement patterns (Paver, 1933:605). To this effect, Paver (1933:605) links the name 'Machacosje' to the Maxakadzi of Maluleke, and 'Paraotte' could not be initially identified by the source but seems to be a reference to the Valauti/Valauri, said in Venda as 'Vhalaudzi' who are of the Dau totem. The Dau totem appears to have played a significant role in the history of both the Vhalaudzi and the Malulekes, signifying a lion. Unlike many of the earlier Venda-speaking groups, the Singo dynasty is reported to have settled in the Zoutpansberg region during the late 1600s, according

to Loubser's (1991:152) analysis, at which time it grew its power and dominance from the Nzhelele valley by defeating and absorbing many of the tribes of the Vhakwevho, Vhandou, Vhanyai, Vhambedzi, and Vhadau, among others. Research on the political history of the Zoutpansberg region supports Loubser's analysis of the Singo dynasty's rise to power and their interactions with neighbouring tribes. This includes accounts of conflict, alliances, and power struggles as different groups vied for control over territory and resources in the northern Limpopo.

## **Early Kingdoms in Southern Africa**

Early records mention a south-eastern kingdom that was led by an African tribe of the Zanj. Oliver and Atmore (2001:197), commenting on Al-Massoude's 922 A.D. records pertaining to a "great kingdom of the blacks", indicate that a kingdom of the Zanj was "situated in the lowlands of the Sofala coast". Further indications reveal that the Zanj had been regularly employed by the sailors of Oman to hunt elephants and to make available the ivory for trade to China and India (Oliver & Atmore, 2001:200). This tenth century Zanj kingdom is identified as possibly an ancestral kingdom of Kiteve, which later during the 1500s-1600s was made tributary of the Mutapa (Oliver & Atmore, 2001:200). Many sources certainly corroborate the existence of Zanj kingdoms along the Sofala coast and parts of Tanzania, with historical records and archaeological evidence supporting the people's role in ivory trade and interactions with sailors from Asia. Additionally, research on early African kingdoms and trade routes indicates the importance of coastal regions like Sofala in facilitating trade between Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. So in southern Africa had existed both large and small kingdoms, some of which are poorly documented in history. The early Tonga kingdom of Otongue, for example, is one that had been written about in little detail after 1560



when the first Portuguese missionaries arrived there when brought into the region through request by the Karanga ruling elite that had conquered Otongue in that period. Regarding the Tonga kingdom of Otongue, while limited documentation exists, historical accounts and oral traditions from the region suggest its existence and subsequent conquest by Karanga migrants. This aligns with broader patterns of political instability and power struggles in the region during the sixteenth century, as documented in various historical records and studies on Southern African history.

Mutapa was an empire led by the Karanga, and through conquest was able to incorporate various kingdoms under its wing. Many of these kingdoms under the Mutapa empire were originally Tonga kingdoms that had succumbed to a new form of rule under the Karanga ruling elite, showing a great raid mentality that rose in the sixteenth century, which was a time dominated by Portuguese penetration through the east coast and into the interior. Furthermore, studies on the Mutapa Empire and the Karanga ruling elite support the assertion that many Tonga kingdoms were incorporated into the empire through conquest. This expansionist policy of the Mutapa rulers is well-documented in historical records and is indicative of the empire's efforts to consolidate power and

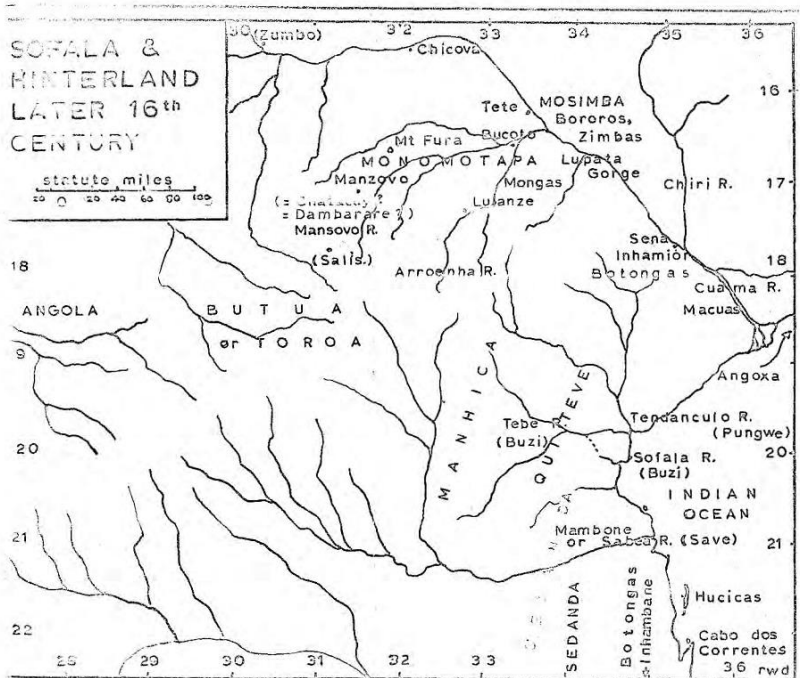
control over neighbouring territories during the period of Portuguese penetration into the region.

The Xitsonga language we know today has historical ties to its earliest written language, called 'Thonga' in Swiss Missionary literature (Junod, 1912), and was spoken in Mozambique and South Africa through various dialects. The idea about the historical connections between the Xitsonga language and the ancient Thonga language spoken in Mozambique and South Africa is certainly supported by linguistic studies and historical evidence (Berthoud, 1884; Junod, 1912). Thonga or Tonga is a name closely linked to language groups with ancient roots, who are mainly found in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. The Tonga languages in Zambia and Malawi, despite having distinct features, share a similar name. This likely reflects the ancient connections between African groups before colonization. Berthoud (1884:50-55) suggests such ancient relationship between Tsonga and the languages of the Sena and the people of Tete, mentioning that Gwamba (Xitsonga) has idioms which approach nearest to the languages of Sena and Tete among the Middle Branch languages. This hints at an ancient connection with the Sena, Tete, and other tribes known as Tonga who have historically lived along the Zambezi River, parts of Malawi, and central Mozambique.

Similarities in terms and linguistic features across Tonga languages in different regions definitely provide strong evidence of a shared linguistic heritage among these groups, especially in this case where Tete is found to have been a hotspot for Tonga populations such as one certain Marenga/Murenga chieftaincy (Cochrane, 2020), and Sena having been inhabited by Tonga groups. Berthoud's observations on linguistic affinity between Xitsonga and languages spoken in Sena and Tete further support this assertion. Shared linguistic and cultural traits among Tonga-speaking groups across southern Africa suggest extensive interactions and exchanges in pre-colonial times.

One association that regularly shows up in connection with the old Tonga territories of Tete is that of the Tonga chief known as Marenga. The name Marenga is to be found in the north of the Zambezi, around the province of Tete where the village of Marenga is still to be found today. The district of Marenga can be identified on the north of Tete on the southern bank of the Zambezi and below the rapids of Kebra-basa. The chief of Marenga had fortifications built for himself and his people on Mount Sacumbe that lies in this district of Marenga, forming a strong boundary of protection against invading forces in the 1800s (Hall, 1909:453). The Inhamocoto kraal of Manzovo (Mazoe) was situated not far from the Marenga kraal (Hall,

1909:445). Nearby was where also the land of Inhampury (Nyampuri) in Bororo was found, and the chief Inhampury is known to have had many lands as vassals to him (Hall, 1909:445).



(Image source: Dickinson 1971. Seen on the map are many of the regions spoken of in this section, the lands of Sena of the Botongas; Tete, Quiteve, Manhica, Inhambane of the Botongas, and the Monomotapa capital of the Mount Fura).

Elsewhere in the Beza ruins in the mountain of Afur (Refure or Fura) the land is said to have served as a burial ground for the old monomotapas (Hall, 1909:115). These ruins are so old they were referred to in terms of the Solomonic era (Hall, 1909:115), and are also located in the Beza-Chidima district where the monomotapa's *zimbaoe* (capital city built of stone) was located. References to the Solomonic era, while suggestive of connections to ancient traditions, may reflect later cultural or religious influences rather than direct historical evidence. The Kingdom of Baroe, according to records of the 1500s acquired by Hall (1909:190), was situated next to that of the Manica/Manhica (south of the Zambezi) and extended to the Manzovo River to the west, with Sena situated on the eastern side. Hall (1909:190) states that these kingdoms belonged to Tonga people before the Portuguese came to settle in Africa in 1505, and were mostly independent kingdoms that eventually came to form a vital part of the empire of Monomotapa. The assertion that Baroe was inhabited by the Tonga people before Portuguese colonization aligns with historical narratives of early Tonga settlement in the region. Further archaeological and historical research could provide additional insights into the kingdom's history and cultural significance. Baroe was sometimes referred to as Ba-Tonga (Hall, 1909:430), and on some maps the name is also spelled as 'Barue',

and it is possible also to come across it being spelled as 'Barwe' or 'Barwa' (Varwa). It's normal to see different spellings in historical texts, which can happen due to various reasons like different transliterations or dialectical variations. This kingdom, along with Quiteve or Kiteve (Xiteve), Manica (Manyika), and Otongue (Tongwe/Tonge) were the kingdoms of the Tonga people, who according to historical records, had settled in those southern parts of Africa long before other “Bantu” tribes are known to have extended towards those areas (Hall, 1909:430). The idea that Tonga kingdoms, including Baroe, played a significant role in the formation of the Monomotapa Empire is supported by historical records and oral traditions. While Tonga kingdoms were indeed independent entities before becoming part of the broader Monomotapa Empire, the exact nature of their involvement and the political dynamics involved would require a dedicated study.

Hall (1909:459) identifies the sixteenth century Karanga leader who invaded the southern Mozambican region of Otongue as Gamba. The Karanga people under Gamba had rebelled against the new monomotapa ruler who was installed in a coup during the mid-1500s, when they fled in a south-eastern direction, eventually reaching the kingdom of Otongue and defeating some of the Tonga people and taking a seat of leadership (Hall, 1909:459). Gamba became a new

ruler at Otongue and ruled over a portion of his Karanga followers and some of the Tonga who had remained after the invasion. In 1559, Chief Gamba's son was baptized by Christian missionaries in the port of Mozambique, indicating interactions between the Karanga rulers at Otongue and the Portuguese authorities. Father Goncalo da Silveira and Father André Fernandes visited the kraal of Gamba, spending almost two years as guests of Gamba. Their letters report that the people of Gamba were Makaranga from the highlands of the Zimbabwean interior, suggesting a connection between Gamba and the Karanga people of Zimbabwe. Liesegang (2014a:26) identifies the conqueror of Otongue as 'Gwambe', indicating that the ruler has been referred to differently by writers. The area conquered by this particular Gwambe is certainly within the same region of Otongue spoken of by Hall (1909:459) who discusses the history of Gamba. When we follow this history then the Gwambe main group seems to have focused its conquest on the territory of the Vilankulu people of Mrori and also a section of the Nkumbi/Nkumbe who were based near the Inharrime River below Inhambane. The Nkumbi/Nkumbe mentioned here should not be confused with Mukumbe/Mocumbe of the Sono lineage.

The name Otongue is sometimes spelled in records as 'Tongwe', 'Tonge', 'Tonga', or referred to as the land of the Ndonge (Liesegang,

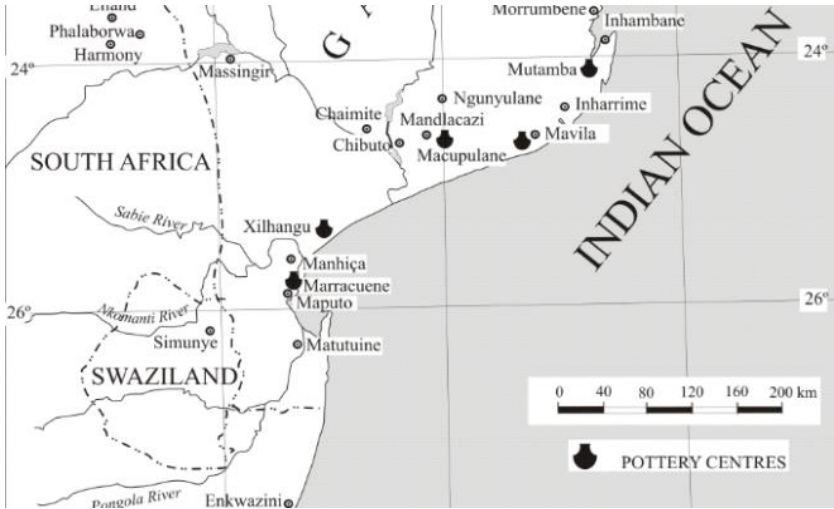
2014a:26). These variations in spelling and nomenclature reflect different interpretations and transliterations of the indigenous names by European observers. In the year 1560 after the invasion by Gamba the Portuguese distinguished only two groups living in Otongue, namely the original Tongas and then the Karangas, indicating the demographic change brought about by the conquest. Today the area that had constituted Otongue is largely part of Chopi and Inhambane Tonga territory, giving an indication that over time many of the Chopi and Batonga people around those parts are descended from the Tonga people who had also mixed with the Karangas of Gamba. The historical connections between the Tonga, Chopi, and Karanga people show how trade, movement, and political agreements shaped Southern Africa for many years. These interactions often resulted in sharing culture, marrying between groups, and taking on customs and traditions from nearby communities. There is a group of Chopi people in the south of Inhambane Bay in the region of the Inharrime River at Zavala who have retained their chiefs under their paramount chief Zavala, who are closer to the Tongas of Inhambane (Liesegang, 2014a:26). Tracey (1948:144) who has done extensive ethnological research on the people also links some of the Chopi people of the 1900s to the old Otongwe kingdom, which is repeatedly shown to have originally been



a Tonga kingdom. Webster (1976:11) too asserts that “all writers appear to agree that when Father André Fernandes wrote in 1560 (G. M. Theal 1898: 141) from the chiefdom of Nyakowongo, he was indeed among the pre-decessors of the modern Chopi”. The Nyakowongo or Nhacoongo settlement can be located today just below Inhambane Bay, and lies on the coastline and not far from the Inharrime River and the community of Nkumbi/Nkumbe, and is today considered part of the larger Chopiland. With this established, it is evident that lineages that are found among the Tsonga-speaking communities, such as the Bila, N’wanati, and Valoyi (Gwambe), are in fact found to be in the genealogical history of all three groups of the Tonga, Chopi, and Karanga.

Through known oral history of the N’wanati people, it is established that they formed part of the first groups of the Panda and Pajila sections of the Tonga people in southern Mozambique, originating from the ancient Beja Tonga people (Maluleke, 2013). Among the group N'wanati, oral and written history accounts for a period where these people had settled at a large river called N’wanati, believed to be located near Mandlakazi in southern Mozambique (Ekblom et al., 2017:57). The name N’wanati was also the name of Gunyule/Ngunyule (the father of Malenga) who also shares his name with the Makwakwa place known as Ngunyulane in southern

Mozambique near the Limpopo River and Mandlacazi. Gunyule is thought to have been buried where the Makwakwa graves are located in the area around Ngunyulane.



(Map by Leonardo Adamowicz)

Malenga, the founding ancestor of the Malulekes who are one of the N'wanati groups, as the eldest son of Gunyule, had to lead his own tribe by separating from his father, and took his section of the clan in the start of the 1700s. Separating from the other section known as the Makwakwa (Ekblom et al., 2017:57), he launched his troops against the Nyai people and migrated towards N'wamahunyani and other areas now part of the larger area today known as Mabalane.

This separation likely occurred due to factors such as political disagreements, territorial disputes, or the desire for autonomy and independence. It reflects common patterns of clan formation and leadership succession in pre-colonial African societies. After separating from his father, Malenga certainly launched military campaigns against the Nyai people and his eldest sons were undoubtedly among the leaders of his regiments. This movement suggests a combination of expansionist policies, territorial acquisition, and possibly conflicts with neighbouring groups. Mashakadzi, one of the sons of Malenga, is known to have come to power after the death of his elder brother Muswana in the mid-1700s, and led his section that went on to settle at Panhame (Ekblom et al., 2017:57). This period in the succession of leadership reflects the internal dynamics and power struggles within the Maluleke clan, as in this case Muswana died in battle while his father Malenga was still alive, which is supportive of the fact that Malenga's sons were part of his military leaders. Muswana seems to be mentioned as "Mossuana" in a 1729 report by Bernardo de Castro Soares as being one of the traditional leaders around the area of "Mocumba" in the north of the Limpopo River (Liesegang, 2014b). The Mocumba (Vakumba) are the Sono/Hlungwani who (like the Chopi people) also used bows and arrows as weapons instead of spears and assegais,

and were one of the chiefly neighbours of the Malulekes in the north of the Limpopo River during the 1700s. These interactions with neighbouring groups, such as the Mocumba, highlight the complex network of alliances, rivalries, and territorial boundaries that characterized pre-colonial southern Africa in the case of the Tsonga people. The area from Mabalane to Pafuri is where many of the Malulekes of the Guyu branch are found today. It is stated by the Van'wanati Clan (2015) that Malenga and his first son, Muswana, are buried near Xinyeketi and N'wa-Mahunyani, Bairo (Mabalani) in the north of the Limpopo River and is today part of Mozambican territory. These burial sites serve as important cultural landmarks and symbols of ancestral reverence for the Maluleke people, connecting them to their past and cultural heritage.

Bandama (2013:46) indicates that it was Maxakadzi who led the Malulekes from the Makwakwa area to the north of the Limpopo River in search for elephant and rhinoceros ivory. This does indicate some confusion on the early history of this group, resulting from the unshakeable fact of poor documenting of this early period. Personal names have a tendency to repeat throughout generations, and where one ancestor is referred to using a particular name, a historical reference may point to the wrong locality and timeframe. The name Maxakadzi may have already been in use by older Maluleke

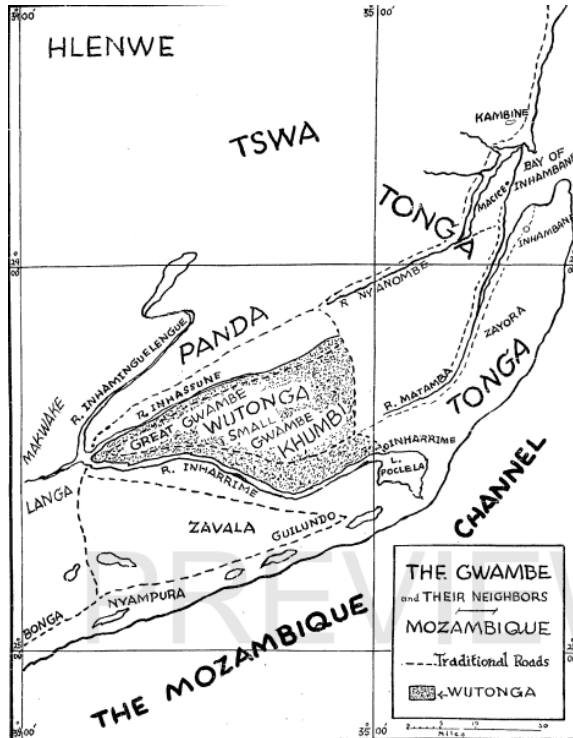
ancestors, which may account for this confusion. It was however Malenga who established the Maluleke Dynasty in the north of the Limpopo River at some time during the start of the 1700s. The Dlamani branch of the Maxakadzis is reported to have settled a vast trading kingdom in South African territory essentially at the Pafuri area on the south of the river Mwenezi and other parts of the wild terrain towards the south at Pafuri (Ekblom et al., 2017:57). This appears to have been somewhere during the early-to-mid 1700s, as indicated by a 1723 report of trade from Delagoa Bay to the interior by the people referred to as “the Mashakadzis” who were the people of Maxakadzi (Bandama, 2013:45).

On the Mozambican side, at around 1810, the small and independent kingdom of Mondlane had multilingual southern Chopi and N’wanati subjects (Liesegang, 2014a:14). Mondlane's state likely extinguished other previously independent chiefdoms, such as the Mandlati and the Khosa Nyoko in the Mahumane area, possibly before 1800. Later, at around 1870, the Mondlane seems to have subjugated and incorporated the Langa chiefdom of Makupulane and the Nhantumbo of the Chidenguele area as well (Liesegang, 2014b).

The Vacopi, who had retained their chiefs after long wars (Liesegang, 2014a:14), had survived under a mixed society comprising of the

Tongas, Kalangas and other smaller groups in the area, however being closest related and associated with the Lenge who are found to be the closest neighbours. From linguistic aspects of the Chopi and Lenge language, and taking from how the people designate tribal names and last names, the name Lenge appears to relate either to '*ku lenga*' (to create or to design), or '*vulenge*' which refers to the west in the Lenge and Chopi languages. Seemingly a founder of various tribal dynasties, Malenga's people are found in many parts of the southern Mozambican coastline and parts of the Limpopo River basin, all seeming to have formed small and independent kingdom states as time progressed. A historical link of the Van'wanati (Maluleke, Makwakwa, Mondlane and others) to kingdoms such as Otongue is also apparent when analysing the subsequent routes of migration and patterns of assimilation supplemented through the historical narratives of the group Vakalanga and the people associated with the history of Gwambe (Liesegang, 2014a; Liesegang, 2007). The descendants of Gwambe, who are originally of the Kalanga dialect among the Karangas are in oral and documented history considered descendants of the Karangas who came to assimilate into the southern Chopi, that part of the tribe also being referred to as Ndonge or Donge, with the oldest Chopi nucleus being

directly related to the Tonga people of old Otongue (Vutonga/Wutonga) and parts of Inhambane (Liesegang, 2014a:16).



(Image: The map shows the parts settled by groups of the Gwambe around a settlement area of Wutonga/Vutonga, as well as groups of the Makwakwa (misspelled as MAKWAKE), Tswa, Hlengwe, and Tonga, published in Fuller, 1955).

Some of the Chopi people see themselves as the ancestral inhabitants of the land of Mandlakazi, which according to oral and written testimony was called Kamaphandani before it was renamed to Mandlakazi (Inguane, 2007:34). This highlights the historical significance of Mandlakazi, also known as Kamaphandani, to the southern Chopi people of Khambani. This suggests that Mandlakazi was originally inhabited by the Chopi people, and the name Kamaphandani predates its renaming. Before the Nguni invasion of Mandlakazi, the Mondlanes were still the ruling authorities in the area (Inguane, 2007:35). According to an old map from 1505-1760, the ancient Panda was located in southern Mozambique, just above what is now Bileni and Chibuto, near the Limpopo River. It was identified as one of the kingdoms within the larger region of Vutonga/Wutonga, also known as Otongwe on an old map of the region (Hall, 1909). The Mondlane branch of N'wanati was originally based in this area, between today's Mabalani up to Chibuto, before moving closer to the coast. Other sections of the N'wanati were primarily located in areas such as Mandlakazi, Ngunyulane, Xikomo/Chicomo, and Chibuto, all of these places being based near the Limpopo River. The Mondlane branch of N'wanati was headquartered in this area, stretching from Mabalani to Chibuto, and they and parts of the Makwakwa can still be found in these areas



today, with many of them established under their own chieftaincies. This migration pattern suggests a historical movement of the Mondlane N'wanati group from inland regions towards the coast, potentially influenced by various factors such as environmental changes, trade routes, or conflicts.

In the Klein Letaba area near the Limpopo River, in now South African territory, the Malulekes had established a small kingdom that depended largely on trade from the east coast with the interior of the Limpopo, such as in the areas between Pafuri, Thulamela, and the Zoutpansberg mountains (Evers, 1974:86). What started off as a small Tsonga chiefdom, according to Evers (1974:86), grew into a vast and popular trading establishment with which different parts of the eastern Transvaal had established trade relations (Evers, 1974:86). This provides insight into the growth and economic importance of the Maluleke kingdom in the northern Limpopo area. Initially a modest Tsonga chiefdom, it evolved into a major centre for trade, serving as a link between the east coast and the interior regions of the Limpopo. The area Beja in the northern Limpopo province of South Africa had been part of the settlement points of at least one of the sections of the Tsonga people at a particular time when groups of the Singo dynasty and later migrants with historical connections to Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe drove out some of the Beja

groups further towards the east. According to Das Neves (1878:91), the old inhabitants of Beja and the Palaures (Valawuri) were very early settlers in what came to be known as the Transvaal and both groups had built their villages on top of the very high mountains to avoid attack by their enemies. When facing an attack, apparently, these people would rise to the highest point of the mountain and attack their enemies with bows and arrows or by hurdling large rocks down the mountain to plunge on their attackers (Das Neves, 1878:91). The people of Beja before the Afrikaners settled at the Zoutpansberg region had paid tribute to the rain queen Mojaji in respect for her rain-making power, but after the Afrikaner settlement in the region and upon the arrival of Albasini under the Portuguese Consul, these people who also included many refugees under Albasini were forced to pay tax to the Dutch (Das Neves, 1878:98). With the establishment of Dutch presence and the arrival of Albasini under Portuguese authority, the dynamics of governance and taxation shifted, impacting the Beja people and other inhabitants of the region. The arrival of European explorers, traders, and colonizers in Southern Africa from the 15th century onwards had a profound impact on societies indigenous to Africa. European colonization, particularly by the Portuguese and later by the Dutch and British,

reshaped political boundaries, social structures, and economic systems in southern Africa.

Albasini was a tax collector who was closely associated with the Boers and took on a role as an administrative figure to strengthen this position (Harries, 1983:174). Albasini's connection with the Boers and his job as a tax collector show how European settlers, particularly the Boers, were gaining more power and influence in South Africa. The payment of tax or tribute also constituted a way of establishing peace in avoiding having to face constant raids by the hostile forces, or to establish safe travel through a territory. This statement helps us understand the complex workings of governance and taxation in the region during the nineteenth century and gives the indication that the payment of tax was not necessarily a form of political acknowledgement or homage. While compliance with tax demands often meant avoiding conflict and ensuring safe passage, resistance could lead to violent repercussions and displacement of communities. Taxation also wasn't just about making money; it was also used to establish control and was often a system of enforcing political dominance. Many of the local African chiefs, being independent and not subject to any form of traditional royal appendage under the Dutch government or Albasini, did not revere them as chiefly figures in the native African sense. Various African

chiefdoms were attacked and some displaced if they refused to pay the required tax under Albasini, however, many of the local Tsonga tribes, such as the Nkunas and Malulekes, refused to have Albasini as a tributary (Harries, 1983:174). Despite the strict regulation to pay tax to the Dutch, some of the Tsonga, Venda, and northern Sotho groups in the Limpopo continued to pay tribute to the rain queen Mojaji (Das Neves, 1878:98). The idea of paying homage to the rain queen Mojaji highlights the persistence of traditional beliefs and power structures alongside colonial governance. Despite the imposition of Dutch taxation, some tribes continued to uphold their traditional practices, including paying tribute to figures like Mojaji. In Loubser (1991:150), it is ascertained that people from a region in the Zoutpansberg were referred to as 'Beja' in early nineteenth century Portuguese documents, and further research indicates that this is indeed the same spelling used as what is today still called Beja in the region between the Zoutpansberg mountains and the village of Elim (what was in Spelonken). Furthermore, the reference to the Beja people in the Zoutpansberg region demonstrates the continuity of local place names and ethnic identities over time, illustrating the historical depth of the people and the complexity of the region's social fabric.

The identification of the “Palaure” as Valawuri (or Vhalaudzi) who are of the Dau totem, and the Beja people who are associated with the Tongas, brings up a connection with the work of Chigwedere (2016) who speaks of one of the early founders of Zimbabwe being a group he identifies as the 'Dau Beja Tonga'. Ironically enough, people associated with the Dau and the Beja Tongas also feature in the history of South Africa, not far from the Zimbabwean locality at all, and these names discussed not only feature in South African history but the names of those groups also shared close proximity in settlement, supported by historical records mentioning those north-eastern parts of the Limpopo and southern Mozambique (Paver, 1933; Das Neves, 1878). This connection extends to South African history, where these groups are also mentioned, particularly in the north-eastern parts of the Limpopo region. The mention of the Dau Beja Tonga group in the history of Zimbabwe could also just suggest a historical connection between the Dau (lion) totem and the Beja Tonga people.

When Inhambane suffered a terrible attack by Ngunis in 1834, groups of the Malulekes and some of the Hlengwes who were stationed in parts of southern Mozambique pressed towards the Kruger National Park and the Limpopo River, under the leadership of Nkuri of the Dlamani branch, who is identified by Dicke (1926:1020-1022) as

‘Shinhambane Maluleke Hlekane’, a son of Ximambana Dlamani (son of Maxakadzi). The migration of the Malulekes and Hlengwes in response to the attack on Inhambane demonstrates the impact of external conflicts on local populations and the subsequent reshaping of settlement patterns in Mozambique. This group had travelled from the east coast, heading along the Levhubu River via the old trade route to eventually reach the proximity of modern-day Pafuri, Xikundu and Malamulele areas, defeating some smaller tribes along the way, others eventually settling at the area known today as Makuleke Contractual Park and along the northern part of what eventually became the Kruger National Park (Shehab, 2011:77). The Malulekes were however already in Mapai, Panhame, and Pafuri under Dlamani and Guyu during the late 1700s, which indicates that when Nguni groups came into Mozambique after being defeated by Shaka Zulu in the *mfecane* war of the 1800s, some of the Malulekes had only been trading near the coast of Mozambique around Inhambane. This is also the same period when Makuleke of the branch of Makahlule was allocated land to settle on at the old Makuleke region by Nkuri during the period 1820-1836.

*"Nkuri then sent his younger son Makuleke (Hlekane) further northwards down the Levubu River to settle at its confluence with the Limpopo" - P. Harries (1987:96)*

It was only later during the 1890s when those territories of the Malulekes were incorporated into the Transvaal during the period of the Afrikaner-led government (Turner, 2004:4). The presence of the Maluleke section led by Nkuri is supported by reports detailing the movement of Voortrekkers (Dutch/Afrikaner travellers) in 1836. Nkuri who had led his people along the Levhubu River to settle in Dzwendenkop (Dzundwini) supposedly carried out a great defeat against the van Rensburg Voortrekkers who crossed through this territory in 1836 (Dicke, 1926:1021). The Treks were during the period between 1835 and 1900 when the Boers had launched what seems to be one of their greatest attacks against the paramount chieftaincies of the north and parts of KwaZulu Natal. Against the Venda leadership, this was especially reflected in their large-scale attacks against the Mphephu who faced defeat by an immense force of the Zuid Afrikanse Republic that came to succeed late in 1898 (Khorommbi, 2001:38). Nkuri's leadership in leading his people to new lands shows how Tsonga communities were able to take charge and stay strong in difficult situations. Their settlement along the Levhubu River and eventual confrontation with Voortrekkers illustrate the complexities of interactions between Tsonga groups and European settlers during the period of colonial expansion. Additionally, the Boers' large-scale attacks against paramount

chieftaincies, such as the Mphephu of the Venda people, highlight the violent conflicts that characterized the colonial period in southern Africa.

The group of Voortrekkers of Van Rensburg, Trichardt, and Potgieter had made their way in the 1830s towards the east coast, accompanied by ill-treated "bushmen" who they had captured as slaves (Khorommbi, 2001:36). The movement of Voortrekkers toward the east coast shows how European settlers were spreading into native lands during the 19th century. Their enslavement of "bushmen" reveals how colonial forces exploited and mistreated indigenous people. In 1836, the group led by Van Rensburg was supposed to pass through (or near) Maluleke territory on their way to the bay, but it was later reported that they were massacred on the journey. The reported massacre of Van Rensburg's group by troops allegedly led by 'Shinhambane Maluleke Hlekane' highlights the conflicts between Tsonga communities and European settlers during this period, as it was considered unusual for large groups of Europeans to be found in such a place at the time. Dicke (1926:1021), claiming this massacre to have been the responsibility of the troops led by 'Shinhambane Maluleke Hlekane', also claims that upon entry into the region the Malulekes had long been familiar with the region because their traders had traversed this territory for many years. This



is evident because in the mid-to-late 1700s Shimambana Dlamani Maluleke, who is the father of Nkuri, is known to have been based in those parts of the northern Kruger National Park which at the time was still widely known as part of the larger Maluleke country. In 1836 a group of the Malulekes of the Nkuri Nkhapuri branch could be found settled at the Ysterberg Mountain near the Little Letaba River in South Africa, an area today found half way between Giyani and the Makhado area (Dicke, 1926). The settlement of the Malulekes near the Ysterberg Mountain and their encounter in 1836 suggests their presence in the region and their interaction with the Voortrekkers who had not yet settled at the town that later came to be known as Louis Trichardt Town. Other available reports do suggest that even in the mid-1600s the Malulekes could be found along the northern Limpopo River, seeming to be during the time of Malenga (Turner, 2004:4). The identification of Maluleke settlements on historical maps of 1868 and 1897 further corroborates their historical presence in the area. An 1868 'Original Map of the Transvaal' by Jeppe and Merensky (1868) indicates the geographical location of "Minga" (Mhinga) and "Serra de Chicundo" (Xikundu) Maluleke settlements, and a later map of 1897 of the South African Republic by Johnston and Johnston (1897) further shows the geographical location of

Mhinga and Makuleke in relatively the same region as discussed in the various documented history of migration and settlement.

The Nkuri branch had the most dominant role in South African territory among all the Maluleke branches. Nkuri had also led other groups besides the Malulekes and essentially formed a strong polity that protected those areas of the Tsonga people against foreign incursion for many years. Pertaining to the identification of senior royalty, traditionally and through their indigenous customs, the direct male descendant of the main head of the family becomes the senior king who leads the family chiefs and directs them into territorial settlement, highlighting the role of indigenous customs and traditions in governance and leadership succession where the eldest is acknowledged. Historically, Tsonga society was organized into chiefdoms led by traditional leaders known as "*Hosi*", and the most senior of them would eventually place his own chiefs on new found land, earning his leadership role as their paramount chief or king. These leaders played significant roles in governance, dispute resolution, and the preservation of cultural practices. The traditional way of identifying senior royalty among the Malulekes highlights how lineage and inheritance are crucial in African indigenous governance systems. In more recent years the interplay of dominance among the Malulekes has been contentious, where since the passing of their

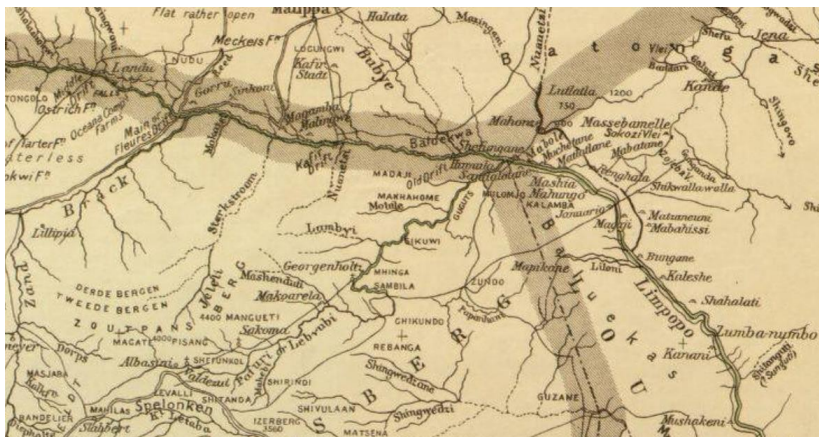
early king, Maxakadzi, and him allocating leadership titles and land to both his sons, Dlamani and Guyu, both branches of the family have since had prominent traditional leadership roles in South Africa and Mozambique respectively.

It was established that the Makulekes of Makahlule are recognized as a junior branch of the Maluleke group (Shehab, 2011:101), despite their name resembling the Maluleke surname. Nkuri from the house of Dlamani, also known as Ximambana, having led the Malulekes and other tribes from the realms of Mozambique to the Limpopo was revered as a leading figure among the Malulekes and other migrating groups, being also of the senior branch of Maxakadzi in the Maluleke lineage. This is also reflected when, after the death of Nkuri, as Harries (1987:96) and Shehab (2011:101) indicate, Makuleke of the Makahlule branch recognised Nkuri's son Mhinga as the leader of the Malulekes, indicating the continuation of leadership within the family lineage after Nkuri.

*"Following the death of Nkuri, Makuleke recognised his elder brother Mhinga as chief of the Maluleke clan" - P. Harries (1987:96)*

This succession reflects the importance of lineage and inheritance in indigenous governance structures. Among some of the South African groups considered to be distinct from the Tsonga people, who were

at one point ruled by Mhinga were the Makhahane, Lotsinga, and Ntshetshange, during the 1800s-1900s (Kirkaldy & Kriel, 2006:142). The concept of distinct South African groups being governed by the Mhinga dynasty, including the Makhahane, Lotsinga, and Ntshetshange, throughout the 1800s and 1900s, shows the varied political scene in northern Limpopo at the time. These groups probably had their own distinct cultural identities and ways of governing, adding to the diverse array of African societies in the political relationship of the Tsonga people and their neighbours.



(Image source: War Department, Adjutant General's Office, Military Information Division. 1899. The northernmost part of the South African Republic in the late 1800s. The Maluleke kingdom established by Malenga and his son Maxakadzi is marked as 'Baluekas' in what is today northern Kruger National Park).

### **Some Ancient Traditional Practices and Customary Law**

Traditional customs and practices have played a vital role in the formation of cultural identity among African populations. Traditional customs and practices are fundamental elements of cultural identity among African communities. These customs, often originating from ancient traditions, have evolved over time and continue to play a significant role in shaping the cultural landscape of African societies. Simple customs that had seemingly started off small and insignificant have certainly developed into complex cultural structures that have come to shape the classification of cultural and ethnic identity in today's life.

Practices that once were part of the tradition of one group have come to be adopted by another that has assimilated into that particular culture either through intermarriage or conquest. This can be noticed even in the rites of initiation such as circumcision. For instance, the Tonga people of the 1500s in the kingdom of Otongue were observed to have been all circumcised, while on the other hand the Karangas who had joined them in the mid-1500s were not circumcised during this period in history (Tracey, 1948:144). This

suggests that male circumcision was a significant aspect of Tonga cultural identity during that period.

In the findings of Le Roux (1999:50) the assumption is that the male circumcision customs practiced by groups such as the Tonga, Venda, and northern Sotho have been brought into the area by the Lemba people, or perhaps a distantly related group of the Lemba that had practiced circumcision before. It may be that circumcision was very much a part of the Tonga people's traditional practices from very early times, as in this case the practice goes back to the 1500s and they may have had this practice even earlier. It is not much surprising then that the Chopi, Lenge, and Tsonga people of the Limpopo still practice male circumcision to this day, and various groups that have been assimilated into these local cultures who traditionally did not practice male circumcision now partake in circumcision rituals. The adoption of male circumcision rituals by other groups like the Chopi, Lenge, and Tsonga people in the Limpopo region shows how cultures mix and change over time. Even groups that didn't traditionally do circumcision have started practicing it, which reflects how neighbouring cultures and historical connections have influenced them.

The people there are Botongas, all circumcised, as I have told your Reverence, we do not know if they have anything else in common with the Moors. We might settle in the kraal of this chief when there is reason to hope that it would yield good fruit, and it would then be necessary to have a letter from the viceroy for the chief.

(Image source: Theal, 1898. Translated from a letter by Father André Fernandes in Otongue on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1560)

The male circumcision rites of the Tsonga people typically start in the winter season. The fact that modern-day Tsonga people still observe male circumcision rites, usually beginning in the winter season, shows how these traditional practices endure even as society changes and modernizes. It is a strong connection to the cultural heritage and identity of African communities, linking them to their ancestors and shared cultural traditions. Khosa (2009) discusses the timeframes and various symbolisms pertaining to the practices observed in male circumcision rites of the Tsonga people of the Limpopo province in South Africa. The discussion on male circumcision rites among the Tsonga people of the Limpopo province offers insights into the cultural practices and symbolic meanings embedded within these rituals. Among some of the Tsonga customs noted is the holding of lashes to symbolise the commencement of the sacred passage, and to distinguish between past initiates and

non-initiates; the use of fire as a symbol for life or the activity of the initiation, and the wearing of white cloth that comes to symbolise the purity in adolescence (Khosa, 2009:54). The use of various symbols such as lashes, fire, and white cloth reflects the deep spiritual and social significance attributed to the initiation process. Among some of the natural coverings worn towards the end of the initiation ceremony is grass that also hides the initiate's identity, complemented by dances that are also performed in celebration (Khosa, 2009:52). The wearing of grass comes to indicate an important role in both male and female initiation rites, as also displayed in Johnston (1977) and Earthy (1925) where the wearing of grass is shown to be a common practice among the groups Vatsonga, Vacopi, and Valenge. Using grass coverings and dances in the initiation ceremony highlights how Tsonga cultural practices value nature and community celebration. These elements not only contribute to the aesthetic and symbolic richness of the rituals but also reinforce the communal bonds and shared identity among the people. The continuity of these practices across different groups, as observed in Earthy's and Johnston's studies, highlights the cultural continuity and interconnectedness among the Tsonga, Chopi, and Lenge communities. Despite variations in specific customs and traditions, the deep-rooted cultural heritage and connections to



ancestors persist, demonstrating the lasting strength of Tsonga cultural identity despite changes in society and history. In Earthy's paper (1925:103) the Valenge are distinguished from the Vahlengwe, and are also distinguished from the Chopi people, however the Valenge and Chopi are acknowledged to be descended from the same ancestral group.

Earthy (1925:103) gives a description of the initiation rites (identified as *ambutsa/ambuta*) of the Valenge girls of southern Mozambique. The description provided by Earthy (1925) sheds light on the initiation rites of the Valenge girls in southern Mozambique, highlighting similarities with the practices of other neighbouring groups such as the Vacopi and the Tonga people of Inhambane. According to Earthy (1925:103) the Valenge practiced the same female initiation rites as the Vacopi and the Tonga people of Inhambane, but this was not the case with the Vatswa who live close to these groups. These rites, identified as *ambutsa*, were integral to the cultural fabric of the Chopi communities. Interestingly, the Vatswa, despite their proximity to these groups and similarities in language, did not share the same initiation rituals.

Female initiation rituals similar to those described by Earthy (1925:103) were also practiced by the Tsonga people of Limpopo well

into the twenty-first century. In the female separation rites of the Valenge, a dominant secret language is taught to the young girls by a *nyambutsi* (female guardian/teacher), a language that could be understood by, and was common to the groups Tonga, Lenge, and Chopi (Earthy, 1925:103). Indicative of a deep cultural link between these three groups, it is understandable that their history and cultural affiliation is difficult to separate. It has been prohibited and considered an offense to use any other language other than the secret language during the separation rites, thus the elder members of the community would understand and communicate in the secret language with ease (Earthy, 1925:103). The strict prohibition against using any other language during these rituals shows the cultural significance attached to the secret language. The female initiation ceremonies of the Chopi and Lenge groups, in Earthy's view (1925:114) may have originated from the Tonga groups of Inhambane (the *Vanyembana/Vakhokha*). The female initiation ceremonies would commence in spring once the chief issues an order for all the girls who are old enough for marriage to pass through the initiation rites (Earthy, 1925:103). The rites entailed a dedicated training during the summer season, followed by a month of initiation school in autumn (Earthy, 1925:103). The Tsonga people of Limpopo practice a female initiation rite known as *tikhomba*, a structured

fertility rite that takes place on an annual basis after the May harvest (Johnston, 1977:12). Much of this initiation practice resembles the female fertility rites of the Chopi and Lenge (refer to Earthy, 1925). This parallel between the initiation practices of these groups further emphasizes the cultural interconnectedness and shared traditions among the diverse communities.

The Tsonga people also practice *mancomani*, which is a ritual custom dedicated towards spiritual healing and usually takes the form of exorcism to rid of negative spirits (Johnston, 1977:12). This ritual reflects the belief in the power of spiritual practices to address physical, mental, and emotional ailments within the community. The spiritual beliefs of the Tsonga people are firmly based on ancestral worship and divination. These practices are fundamental to their belief system and are thought to link individuals with their ancestors and spiritual energies. Spiritual beliefs have formed the great foundation of beliefs in the magical healing properties of ancestral worship and divination among the Tsonga people. The spiritual beliefs of the Tsonga people are deeply ingrained in their culture. Ancestral worship entails honouring and respecting deceased ancestors, seeking their guidance, protection, and blessings. Divination involves seeking insight or guidance from spiritual forces

through methods like consulting diviners or interpreting signs and omens.

In reference to Masoude's early accounts of the Zanj, Mullan (1969:38) reveals that the Zanj people acknowledged a supreme being, who was referred to as 'Maklandjalou'. The term 'Maklandjalou', if it were to be associated with the nearest sounding word in Xitsonga or the Chopi language, in reference to worship, would be nearer to '*magandzelo*', which refers to a traditional form of praise or worship made to the ancestral spirits on a spot of sacred-ancestral importance. The association between 'Maklandjalou' and '*magandzelo*' would in this case suggest a connection between the spiritual beliefs and practices of the Zanj people and those of the Tsonga and Chopi communities. Earthy (1925:19) in 'Some Agricultural Rites Practiced by the Valenge and Vachopi' details some of the agricultural rites and sacred religious practices such as the *magandzelo*, which gives some perspective on this ancient practice of worship by the Tsonga, Chopi and Lenge people. These practices provide insight into the ancient traditions and beliefs of the people, contributing to the understanding of their cultural heritage. Mullan (1969:49-50) however goes on to make associations of the history of that particular 'Maklandjalou' with the Sesotho-speaking groups,

suggesting possible cultural exchanges or shared beliefs between different linguistic and ethnic communities in that part of Africa.

With reference to the Tonga people residing between the Zambezi plateau and the Kafue rivers, the people are said to revere God in much the same way in which they revere the rain, in which way to them the word God and rain is attributed to bear the same reference (Davidson, 1915:387). With these Tonga people, it is said that they believe in *Mubumbi* (the creator) described as the moulder of all life or the creator of all things, then there is *Chilenga* who is referred to as the originator of customs or traditions, and *Leza*, the spirit that created earth and all vegetation is associated with the rain or thunder (Davidson, 1915:387). In Chipembele and Ilubala-Ziwa (2018:7) it is stated that Leza is God who makes all life, creates the Sun, and brings the rain to the earth.

The Beja people of the Zoutpansberg are known to have been accustomed with rain-making and are reported to have taken part in a rain-making ritual concerned with the rain queen Mojaji in the mid-1800s (Das Neves, 1878:105). These Bejas who are mentioned appear to have communicated in the Xitsonga language or one of its related variations or dialects, where it is even stated they wore and were in possession of 'majovo', that is the *madzovo* (animal skin) and that

during the ceremony they also spoke some other words in the “Beja language” (Das Neves, 1878:105). Here the Beja language is clearly distinguishable from the languages of the other neighbouring groups the Pedi, Lobedu and the Venda, where the word *madzovo* is only found in the Xitsonga language among these groups, indicating that at least some of those Bejas among the people of Mojaji were a Xitsonga-speaking group. These historical accounts indicate that the Beja people played a role in preparing the remedy for the rain-making ritual, showing their involvement in this important cultural practice with a group that spoke a different language (Das Neves, 1878:112-113).

Various African groups often referred to as the “Bantu” have also the custom of pouring African traditional beer as libation in a ceremony of praise, and if the deceased was a rainmaker the family gathers around the grave in times of drought to conduct rain-making ceremonies (Davidson, 1915:388). This practice reflects the belief in the spiritual power of rainmakers and their ability to influence weather patterns. Libation ceremonies, where liquid offerings are made to ancestors or spirits, are prevalent in African traditional religions and are seen as a way to honour and communicate with the deceased.

In terms of burial practices, the Tonga people between the rivers Zambezi and Kafue tend to build a covering over the graves of their loved ones, such as a small hut or roofing, and on top of the graves they place a skull of an animal or something important that had belonged to the deceased (Davidson, 1915:388). This practice of placing items of significance on graves is found in various cultures, symbolizing respect or offering to the departed soul. Ceremoniously, an iron hoe and an elephant bone were placed on the grave of Maxakadzi at Mapai after his passing, who is one of the great ancestors of the Malulekes known famously for being one of the early kings of the tribe who ran elephant and rhinoceros hunting expeditions (Bandama, 2013:45). This act signifies the importance of certain items associated with the deceased and shows the cultural significance attached to them. The placing of an iron hoe on the grave is not much surprising in this case. Iron hoes were considered a form of wealth in southern African history. Harries (1983) even discusses certain 'Beja hoes' that were an important source of wealth for the Tsonga people at a certain period in history. Beja marriage hoes were manufactured and preserved, and considered a sacred form of wealth in many traditional African customs, so much that they were held in high regard to even pay for marriage and were so valued that the possessors did not want to degrade them by

ploughing the ground (Harries, 1983:297). In an interview with chief Mapai, one of the Mozambican-based sections from the Maxakadzi branch, Bandama (2013:45) notes how iron hoes formed a vital part of marriage in the olden days, where a chief would pay with these iron tools as a form of bridal wealth.

In terms of musical practices, musical expression and traditional celebration have come to display a meaningful aspect of African culture. The people of Otongue were as well accustomed to singing and dancing, and were observed by Father André Fernandes as being of a joyful character, enjoying spending their time singing and engaging in artistic performances (Tracey, 1948:145). The instruments of the Tonga in this kingdom are described as having been “many gourd bound together with cords, and a piece of wood bent like a bow, some large and some small, and to the openings in which they fasten trumpets with the wax of wild-honey to improve the sound, and they have their treble and bass instruments” (Tracey, 1948:145). This description, mentioning many gourd bows tied together, and the instrument made in bass and treble variations, may very well be describing the native African piano, or the *timbila* to be precise. Tracey (1948) provides valuable insights into the musical traditions of the Tonga people in Otongue, including descriptions of their instruments and cultural practices, linking them to modern



musical practices of the Chopi people of Mozambique. It is apparent that the Portuguese were mostly unfamiliar with this sort of African instrument during the 1500s, only having to learn more of its complexity as the years progressed. Today the world knows the *timbila* popularly as the xylophone, and one other member of the family known as the marimba. Deservingly so, these instruments have their origin in African society.

different language. (69) They practiced circumcision, having acquired this, but evidently no other muslim customs, from the Moors. (70) Although regarded by some as more primitive than the Karanga, they had among them gifted instrument makers and musicians in whom ocean-borne contacts had drawn out talents far in advance of those in the rest of Nantu Africa. (71)

(4) There were Tonga chiefs left ruling in the immediate hinterland of Inhambane - ilveira baptised some on his way to embark for Mozambique and the monomotapa - these were the remnant of chiefs under whom the astonishing development must have taken place.

(Source: Dickinson, 1971)

The performance of the people of Otongue, backed by an orchestra of traditional instruments, was noted to be symbolic of the actions of warfare, where the performers would surround "the enemy", depicting a state of conquering, and martial arts that are symbolic of open warfare and pretty much the actions typical of a war scenario,

all being expressed in a musical sense (Tracey, 1948:145). This description draws a definite parallel with what is today known as the *ngodo* performance of the Chopi people, which is performed in much the same manner described in the work of Tracey (1948:146). The *ngodo*, like many traditional African performances, is filled with symbolism. The actions and movements of the performers often carry deeper meanings, reflecting aspects of Chopi cosmology, mythology, and social structure. For instance, the act of encircling "the enemy" in the performance may symbolize concepts of community defense or spiritual protection. Recognizing the significance of *ngodo* and *timbila* music, efforts have been made to preserve and promote these cultural traditions. Cultural institutions, educational initiatives, and festivals play a vital role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and ensuring its continued vitality for future generations.

The Chopi people, popularly known for their musical ability, mastered manufacturing and performance of the *timbila* that forms a necessary element of the *ngodo*. Even though *ngodo* and traditional *timbila* music have strong historical foundations, they are also evolving to fit contemporary settings. Nowadays, *ngodo* performances might include modern instruments, feature new compositions, or mix with other music styles, showing ongoing

cultural exchange and creativity. The *timbila* instrument is also known as *muhambi* in the Lenge language, however the term '*timbila*' is more popular and is also understood by the Rhonga, Lenge, Tonga of Inhambane, and also by the Tsonga people of South Africa (Junod, 1929:275). The *ngodo* performance is not merely a musical event but a living cultural heritage of the Chopi people and other neighbouring communities. It serves as a means of passing down historical narratives, societal values, and traditional knowledge from one generation to another. The mastery of the *timbila* and participation in *ngodo* performances are traditionally passed down through apprenticeship and oral tradition. Younger generations learn from experienced musicians within their communities, fostering a sense of continuity and cultural identity.





(Images from footage supplied by The Associated Press)

Musical practices of the Chope and Lenge people are certainly the closest resembling those of the Tsonga people of South Africa. With a dominating call-and-response method of singing resembling the Chope traditional *mzeno* (or *mzenu*); a habit of musical production inclined towards a synthesised version of the traditional marimba, and a dance style that involves a traditional skirt (*xigejo*, and *tinguvu* or *xibelani*) where a shaking of the hips and traditional footwork forms the great part of the dance routine, are all as important as it is with the *ngodo* and related musical practices of the Chope. This suggests adaptation and innovation in musical instrumentation to suit contemporary contexts while preserving traditional elements. It is certainly in line with the historical interrelatedness between these groups that such similar cultural practices are witnessed. One other

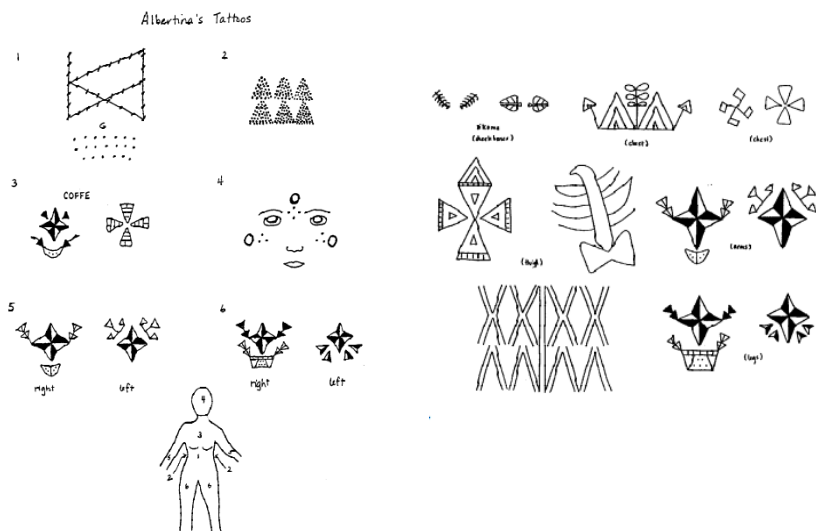
among the oldest known instruments used by the Tsonga and Chopi people is the *xitende*, a braced gourd bow of custom, native origin (Johnston, 1981:109). The first reported use of the *xitende* is noted by a Jesuit priest in the year 1723 and it is thought to have been used by the Tsonga people, where it is also reported that the Swati and Zulus had adopted their particular gourd bow (*umakhweyana*) from the Tsonga people of Mozambique during the 1800s (Johnston, 1981:109). The Chopi gourd bow is also similar to that of the Tsongas of Limpopo, and the Chopi call it the *tshitendole*, whereas to the north the Mtembe people of Kenya who are also accustomed to this instrument call it the *ntono* (Johnston, 1981:109). This indicates a widespread cultural exchange and diffusion of musical instruments across different ethnic groups.

According to Earthy (1924:575), the Valenge men differed from the Ndau and the Nguni in terms of their body markings and other forms of symbolism on their body, such as in the tradition of ear piercing. The Tonga, Lenge and Chopi men did not have the custom of ear-piercing, which is a practice that was brought into the area by the Ngunis and forced onto many of the local tribes and eventually adopted by some such as the Ndau. Earthy (1924:575) mentions that if a Lenge man would dare to walk into Chopi territory with his ears pierced he would be killed immediately, as he would be considered

to be a Mungoni. The absence of ear-piercing among the Tonga, Lenge, and Chopi men, as opposed to the Ndau and Nguni, reflects cultural distinctions and historical interactions among these different ethnic groups.

In reference to the facial markings of the Vacopi in the early days, the people would mark one or two lines of small scars called *mipatarongo* running from the eye to under the chin (Earthy, 1924:579). These markings, apparently, served to represent tear tracks running from the eyes down to the chin and were very much considered a sacred aspect of the people's culture (Earthy, 1924:579). Some of the Vacopi men also had a line of markings that crossed from the forehead down to the tip of their nose, and these particular markings are known as *tinjere* or *minjere* (Earthy, 1924:579). Some of the Chopi women, on the other hand, had the custom of covering almost their entire body with markings called *magwaba* or *magwava*, which the Chopi men would make to a smaller extent on their foreheads, nose, chin, neck, or on the cheeks (Earthy, 1924:579). Collectively the particular designs of these markings would be referred to as *tinhlanga*, taking different shapes and patterns, and the unique designs would often be incorporated into the decorations on pots, walls, and other surfaces (Earthy, 1924:579), a custom that came to represent a form of custom writing

style. These markings, collectively known as *tinhlanga*, therefore weren't just for aesthetics; they were a form of custom writing, each design telling a unique story. The Vacopi and Valenge also used herbal mixtures made from plant roots to make their tattoos, such as those made from the *mjawaswawe* (*Royena Cilloso*) or the *xirole* (*Rubiaceae*), and these tattoos were variously referred to as *swithavelo* or *swibayane* (Earthy, 1924:579). These forms of facial markings, those on the nose in particular, gave rise to the identification of related groups such as the Tsonga of Limpopo to be referred to as '*knobneusen*' (knob noses) by nearby groups of the Afrikaners. Thus, beyond mere decoration, these markings served as symbols of identity, culture, and connection among the ancestors of the Tsonga people. The tattoos, called *swithavelo* or *swibayane*, were not only a form of self-expression but also a way of connecting with nature and their ancestors.



(Images source: Tattoo designs of the Chope people. Pictured drawings by Gengenbach, 2003)

On the other hand in a different locality, an important feature of the ancient traditional practices of the Tonga groups of Zimbabwe is the practice of matriarchy where women served very important roles in the household. Among some of the Tonga people of Zimbabwe, matriarchy is still practiced, such that if a man finds himself a wife he would move in with the family of the wife, however inheritance such as wealth and chieftainship among these people passes through the woman so that if a chief is to pass on, the title would pass on to his sister's first son (Owomoyela, 2002:94). Like the Tonga people of



Zambia and Zimbabwe, the Tonga of Malawi tend to follow a matriarchal system as well, where for instance, chieftaincy passes from a chief to his nephew, however the royal family may sometimes intervene to elect a preferred chief from the family if seen necessary (Cochrane, 2020:14). Apart from language, the prevailing feature of the customary practices of the Tonga people of Gwembe Valley, Zimbabwe, and Malawi that sets them apart from the Tsonga people of South Africa is their matrilineal and egalitarian customs. Among the Gwembe Valley Tonga people of Zambia, descent is recognised through the women, where all Tonga children belong to the lineage of the mother, and the child's primary authority figure is not the child's father but the mother's brother who is the uncle (Scudder, 2005:2). As distinct as they are from these Tonga groups in many customs, in this case also, the Van'wanati ancestry has been dominated by inheritance on the paternal side for many generations (Ekblom et al., 2017:58), stretching as far back as oral and genealogical history can trace. This is in contrast to the Tonga people of Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and other parts where a matriarchal system is observed. The Van'wanati, considered in oral history as a main group of the Beja Tonga (Maluleke, 2013), trace their ancestry through the male line, which is more in line with the practices of culturally-similar groups who have been following this patriarchal

system as well, such as the Chopi, Lenge, and Tonga people of Inhambane. Stepping out of southern African society and more to the north-east, the Beja nomads (considered a distinct group) who are found in great numbers in the west and south of Sudan share similarity in matriarchal customs with the Tonga people of Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia. Among these Beja people of Sudan the most important figure in the household is also the mother's brother (Asante & Mazama, 2009:118). The Beja of South Sudan in modern times, though, have shifted towards a patriarchal system in line with the Christian and Islamic principles that follow patriarchy (Asante & Mazama, 2009:118), a divergence from those matriarchal practices that once formed a part of their ancient culture.

Where royal leadership is concerned among the Tonga of southern Mozambique, the most senior *hosi* or chief of all houses becomes *hosinkulu* (king) of the tribe in line with the ancient royal practices of the people, who leads the royal chiefs and subject communities towards territorial and monetary gains. The senior chief is recognised through the first wife within the respective royal households. The military regiments who are known in the Maluleke's history are almost always made up of the sub-houses of the clan (Dicke, 1926; Harries, 1987). This demonstrates the significance of royal leadership within Southern African Tsonga societies, where even during the

times of Maxakadzi and Malenga, the most senior chief, recognized through the first wife within royal households, assumed the role of king (*hosinkulu*) and had to lead the tribe's royal chiefs and subject communities. The *Mavandla* or *tindhuna* military regiments, composed of sub-houses of the clan, played a crucial role in the tribe's history, often associated with preserving royal customs and participating in conflicts and management of tribal land. The *mavandla* or councillors form a great factor in preserving the royal customs of the tribe and regularly intervene at a royal court (*huvo*) to sort out succession disputes and tribal conflicts.

## **Organisation and Trade**

The Tonga people are certainly one of the most spoken of in history when it comes to local and international trade in the south-eastern parts of Africa. The Tonga people were integral to trade networks that connected south-eastern Africa with both local and international markets. Delagoa Bay served as a significant hub for trade, attracting merchants from various regions. European traders during the early 1800s are known to have met local African traders along the Delagoa Bay, reported as traders who had the distinct tattoo markings on their faces (Gengenbach, 2003:111). The Tsonga people of South Africa were very active traders at the Delagoa Bay, having to travel long distances to secure the trade potential at the coast. The Tsonga/Tonga people engaged in trade with both the pre-Vhavenda and Bapedi communities from 1554 onwards, stretching from the southern parts of Mozambique and into the Limpopo region and occasionally reaching Zimbabwe. Items traded with the Venda and Pedi included beads, clothing, maize, guns, soap, and shoes, which the Tsonga acquired from the Portuguese. In return for these items, they were rewarded with ivory and iron by the Venda people. Trade relationships were mutually beneficial, with the Tsongas obtaining goods from European traders and exchanging them for commodities

like ivory and iron with their partners. The Tsonga traders travelled long distances to access coastal trade opportunities, demonstrating their mobility and adaptability in navigating regional trade networks. Their activities extended into present-day Zimbabwe, demonstrating the extensive reach of their trading networks. In terms of dressing, the Tsonga people wore natural clothing material such as animal skins and tree bark. However, it is made apparent that the people of Vutonga (Otongue) were already wearing cloth and beads in the 1500s, which were imported from India (Theal, 1898:76), attire similar to that worn by the Tsonga people of today and which is still also largely imported from India:

so tightly that they are hidden under their arms. Others dress in our pieces of cloth which come from India. All carry bows and arrows and small assagais.

The women wear a piece of cloth which I think suited to them, it is not very long, and over it they wear many strings of different coloured beads twisted together in front, and arranged to fall one below the other at the back. They wear all sorts of finery, such as crowns and circlets, on their heads, which are half shaved, but the men's heads are not fit to be seen, which is the reason that I rejoiced to see the prince wear a cap, for some of them wear ten horns on their heads, others less, made with their hair and pieces of stick.

In the 1700s and 1800s the Tsonga people would travel from as far as the Limpopo to trade at the coast of Mozambique. Trade served as a means to enhance tribal wealth, acquire resources for agriculture and defense, and to secure necessities such as clothing, food, and marriage dowries. Merensky, one traveller and map charter who

passed through the north of the Limpopo in 1862 met a Tsonga trader by the name of 'Malima' who resided at an area of the same name (sometimes spelled Malema on maps) who is identified in the source as a '*Lekwapa*' (a derogatory term for a Tsonga person bearing the peculiar ritualistic facial markings) (Hay, 2015:44). Malima was a local trader and a carrier of local goods that traversed through the region, an area not very far away from the Mhinga and Xikundu villages, and was very popular at Inhambane and the Delagoa Bay (Hay, 2015:44). The 'Baroka' and those identified on references and maps as the 'Makwapa' (Magwamba) were essentially decentralised groups of the South African Tsonga-speaking people who were to some extent specialised in metalwork and often employed as blacksmiths, hunters, and traders of note (Hay, 2015:43). Their decentralized nature allowed for flexibility in trade and specialization in various economic activities, contributing to the economic vitality of the northern parts of South Africa. These are some of the tribes that had settled nearer to the Mojaji territory and thought of by Michelle Hay (2015:43) to have not constituted a centralised polity but somehow formed a closely knit group of traders who had control over much of the commercial ties with the Bapedi and Lobedu. Despite their decentralized structure, these tribes were eventually subsumed into a defined unit under the

leadership of Mhinga Sundhuza during the Bantustan system in the 1900s. This process of centralization led to the consolidation of power and authority under established Tsonga and Shangaan leadership structures, marking a significant shift in the political organization of the communities.

As far as other forms of early trade are concerned, it is suggested that the early Arab, Indian, and perhaps Persian traders who sailed towards the coast during the early A.Ds must have taken "Zanj wives" and that this led to the emergence of a distinct group of people with a set of customs inherited from those foreign traders (Le Roux, 1999:64). Early Arab, Indian, and Persian traders engaged in maritime trade along the African coast, establishing trade networks that facilitated cultural exchange between foreign traders and local African communities. The practice of taking "Zanj wives" suggests intermarriage and cultural assimilation, leading to the emergence of hybrid cultural identities among certain groups, such as the Lemba. One point of interest in relation to this is that the term '*mushavi*' or '*muxavi*' (buyer) used to recognise someone particularly from the Lemba group amongst the local people (Le Roux, 1999:49-50), is a term originating from the Tsonga and related language dialects, where the word features in Xitsonga and not among the Venda, Sotho, or the Nguni groups of languages. This name *muxavi* could

have been given to those people by the Tsongas and does not appear to have originated with the Venda people who are today integrated with the Lemba and regularly associated with them in most literature and social settings. This may indicate that the Lemba had a significant amount of interaction with the Tsonga groups and thus were given this name '*vaxavi*' to denote them as buyers, essentially a small hint to the Lemba's historical ties with the foreign tradesmen. The historical ties between the Lemba and foreign traders, as indicated by the use of the term "*muxavi*", shed light on the broader historical context of trade and migration in Africa. The origin of this term in Tsonga dialects suggests a close relationship between the Lemba and old Tsonga groups, possibly influenced by trade interactions and cultural exchange. The Lemba's association with foreign traders suggests a long history of engagement with external influences, shaping their cultural identity and customs over time (Velez Grilo, 1958). This view of history brings up an interesting dynamic, as historical indications point to a much older history of the Zanj who are also associated with the Beja, of a history stretching far back to the north-eastern parts of Africa. The mention of the Zanj as having historical connections to north-eastern Africa and their association with the Beja people further contextualizes the historical dynamics of trade and migration in Africa. The Zanj's presence in north-eastern



Africa suggests a broader network of trade and cultural exchange that extended across the continent, linking distant regions through maritime trade routes.

A separate nomadic group known as the Beja, as already indicated, is to be found in parts of Sudan, who are part of the original African tribes in the region. In a different context the term 'Beja' in South Africa shows up in the historical narratives of the group Van'wanati, and subsequently the name "Beja hoes" was given to refer to the popular iron hoes that were traded at the Delagoa Bay and surrounding areas. Regarding these particular hoes, Harries (1983:281) states that "these hoes were given the adjective beja which was the Tsonga name for their area of provenance in the northern Transvaal". The Tsonga people traded these beja hoes (*swikomu swa nxaviselano*) as they were quite popular among the traders at the coast of Delagoa Bay, and as indicated, they originated from Beja in the Transvaal and were manufactured by the Tsonga people (Harries, 1983:281). In the early 1860s the beja marriage hoes were more sought after by the Portuguese who had reduced their import tariff by 25%, allowing more of these iron tools to be exported from the east coast of southern Africa (Harries, 1983:296). In 1875 the value of these beja hoes dropped as there had been a surplus of them being imported and demand fell substantially, thus the local

traders did not trade in them as often as before (Harries, 1983:297). The Tonga people of Zambia were as well great iron smiths, and produced their own iron works in older times. Rival groups such as the Barotse, would often raid their territory, taking all the iron and killing the iron smiths so as to weaken their possession of the iron that was considered something of great value that could make them wealthy and powerful, and able to make weapons to defend themselves (Davidson, 1915:367-368).

It was not necessarily iron trade alone that groups of the Tsonga were known for. One of the most notable forms of trade and industry among the Tsonga people was their manufacturing of fabric, baskets, and containers made from fibres and tree bark (Morais, 1988:37). Basket weaving must have been a lucrative business for these people, and the history of association with weaving and craftwork is a display of their large capacity to survive through such manual labour. It is such labour that has allowed the people to acquire food and to boost their agricultural setups. In terms of regular agricultural diet, groups such as the Lenge favour maize, ground nuts, beans, sweet potatoes, and pumpkins, with *Sclerocarya caffra* being primarily used to produce traditional beer (Morais, 1988:126). Their harvesting period starts off from January and ends in August, while towards the

end of the year food often tends to be scarce as the season is not ideal for the worthy crops to thrive (Morais, 1988:126).

### **Genetic Differentiation and Related Groupings**

Being a large group carrying a common name and some similarities in cultural practices, the various clusters of the Tonga of southern Africa are however often spoken of in terms of distinctness, primarily based on one simple analysis of the linguistic factors. Of course language plays an important role in determining relatedness, but it is very relevant to recognise relatedness through other means between groups that have otherwise come to adopt a set of distinct linguistic features, with one case in point being the various Karanga and related groups of the Kalanga, Rozwi, Venda, and Lobedu groups who it is not uncommon to come across them being spoken of in terms of a common origin, though today having substantial differences in language. It may be the case among some of the various Tonga groups of southern Africa that a great bond at one point in time had bound the tribes together, where unforeseen displacement and the disruption in social setups from neighbouring tribes or foreign nations had caused a serious restructuring of the social, cultural, and linguistic aspects of the people's life. The history of displacement and

migration, whether due to internal conflicts, external invasions, or colonial pressures, has likely played a significant role in shaping the social, cultural, and linguistic landscapes of Tonga communities. Understanding these historical movements can provide insights into their interrelatedness. With this reason it is necessary to as well disseminate other points of reference, such as dialectic similarity, shared cultural practices, displacement history, and genetics, which may all allude to the interrelatedness of the diverse people. Genetic studies for instance can offer valuable clues about population movements, migrations, and genetic relationships among different groups. Analysing genetic data alongside linguistic and historical evidence can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Tonga groupings and their connections.

In terms of language the Tonga people of Zambia are grouped into seven related language groups including the Tonga, Twa, ila, Lenje, Lundwe, Sala, and Soli, which are believed to be related in some capacity, while some of these are thought to be dialects of the same language (Chitebeta, 2018). These related languages, however, feature distinct characteristics from those of the other Tonga groups such as the Tongas of Inhambane and the Tongas of Malawi. The Gitonga language of Mozambique is considered a distinct language from the Chitonga of Zambia and Malawi, and all three of those

languages are also quite different from the Tsonga language of South Africa, only converging on a few words that indicate a very distant relationship. The Gitonga of southern Mozambique shares some features with the Chopi language, and Xicopi itself sounds closer to Xilenge, and to a smaller extent Xitsonga. One example of similarity between Tsonga and Chopi is that in Chopi society, maternal relatives are grouped together with patrilineal kin under the term "*mashaka*" (relatives), which is similar to the Tsonga people of South Africa who also call their relatives "*maxaka*". Beyond language, shared cultural practices, customs, and traditions can also hint at common ancestry or historical interactions among Tonga groups. For example, the similarity in kinship terminology between Chopi and Tsonga societies suggests cultural continuity or influence despite linguistic differences.

Chopiland is bordered by the Indian Ocean to the east and south, while its northeast is bordered by the land of the Inhambane Tonga. This geographical setup indicates that Chopiland is coastal and close to the territory of the Inhambane Tonga. Despite speaking mutually incomprehensible languages, the Tsonga and Chopi share similar cultures and political structures. There has been significant intermarriage and cultural exchange between the two groups, leading to almost identical religious beliefs and practices. This indicates historical intermarriages and religious similarities between

the Chopi and Tsonga people. There is a long history of cultural exchange and integration, leading to shared religious practices and beliefs between the two communities. The Malulekes in South Africa, according to classification under The “Bantu” Languages, are identified with the Xiluleke dialect (NUG: S53A) under the Xitsonga language group (NUG: S52/53, ISO: tso) (Van de Velde et al., 2019:52). Xicopi or the Chopi language (NUG: S61, ISO: cce) is essentially grouped together with Xilenge (NUG: S611) in the language classification system, and Gitonga is listed under this Chopi group (NUG: S62) (Van de Velde et al., 2019:52).

The Tonga language of Zambia and parts of Zimbabwe (NUG: M64, ISO: toi) shares commonality with related language groups of the Plateau Tonga and Valley Tonga, variously referred to as the Lenje (NUG: M61, ISO: leh), Lukanga Twa (NUG: M611, ISO: leh), Soli (NUG: M62, ISO: sby), Sala (NUG: M631, ISO: shq), ila (NUG: M63, ISO: ilb), Kafue Twa (NUG: M633, ISO: ilb), Lundwe (NUG: M632, ISO: ilb), Toka (NUG: M651, ISO: dov), and Leya (NUG: M652, ISO: dov) (Van de Velde et al., 2019:52). The Lenje language of Zambia mentioned here should not be confused with the Lenge language of southern Mozambique, which is a distinct language. Chitonga or the Tonga language of Malawi (NUG: N15, ISO: tog) is listed under the Manda group of languages.

In terms of displacement history, we can search in neighbouring countries to determine if there are other Tonga groups who use the same lineage names as the Tsonga people of the Van'wanati clan, which can indicate long lost bonds. There is an old record in Malawi where the names Malenga and Marenga are also found among the Tonga people of Bandawe, which happens to be the same name as that of Malenga of the Maluleke Van'wanati lineage. In that part of Malawi, an 1800s stockade village of Marenga was to be found, which served as a great defense force against the Ngunis who ravaged different parts of Malawi in the 1800s (Cochrane, 2020:32). Cochrane (2020:33) mentions the Chief Marenga, father of one Chief Malenga Mzoma, who had met David Livingstone in around 1856. With this particular dynasty, both forms of 'Malenga' and 'Marenga' are used, however it is not immediately evident that the names originate from the same forefather of the Malulekes, although it is not outside the realm of possibility that there is some old relationship as in this case both groups identify with a Tonga origin. The use of both "Malenga" and "Marenga" suggests variability in naming conventions but also hints at potential historical connections. This particular Marenga/Malenga dynasty in Malawi is also spoken of in an earlier reference by Hall (1909:464) mentioning the old Tonga people of Tete. Malenga in those parts of Malawi is the name of the

chieftaincy or dynasty that the Tonga of Bandawe identify with, and it is a name associated with the Malenga stockade villages that served as a resistance (a protective element) and a source of unity for the Tonga people of Malawi and others who are found along the province of Tete in Mozambique (Cochrane, 2020:33). It is however important to not assign every other name that resembles that of Malenga of the Van'wanati clan to a common individual. According to the 'Encyclopedia of African Religion', the name 'Murenga' also features among the Shona-speaking groups (Asante & Mazama, 2009:157), where in this version of history and tradition, Murenga Sororenzou is the son of Mambiri and grandson of Tovera (Tovela). Murenga is revered as an ancestor of various groups of the Shona-speaking people. The legends of Murenga Sororenzou have served as the source of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle that started in May 1896 and referred to as the 'Chimurenga' (Asante & Mazama, 2009:446).

Tonga/Thonga groups are known to have dispersed from southern Mozambique towards other regions from very old times, one typical example being the Makwakwa people who were dispersed by the Ngunis of Zwangendaba in the 1830s at the time of the Zulu wars (*mfecane*) and are now found in northern Malawi. The dispersal of Tonga/Thonga groups from southern Mozambique to other regions,



such as northern Malawi, illustrates patterns of migration and settlement that have shaped the demographic landscape of southern Africa over centuries. In July 2014, the Van'wanati of South Africa visited their Makwakwa relatives in Mzuzu, Malawi, aiming to reunite after more than 180 years of separation (Van'wanati Clan, 2015). Today, the Van'wanati-Makwakwa community in Malawi, under Paramount Chief Perembe, has its own small kingdom as it is regarded as an independent polity. The Makwakwas of Malawi claim descent from Ndindani among the Mondlane groups in southern Mozambique and parts of South Africa (Van'wanati Clan, 2015). The efforts by the Van'wanati of South Africa to reconnect with their Makwakwa relatives in Malawi highlight the lasting bonds and shared heritage among dispersed Tsonga communities, despite being separated by distance and time.

Junod (1912:22) in his assessment of the history of the Malulekes with the Nyai or Kalanga race is a case to indicate that the Tonga people's history has in any case been very interconnected with that of the Kalanga or Nyai people. Perhaps once forming a vital part of Kalanga and Nyai history, other sources indicate that the Van'wanati Malulekes spent many years fighting the Vanyai to a point where the Malulekes eventually defeated the Nyai people of areas nearer to the Limpopo River at some time during the 1600s-1700s (Ekblom et al.,

2017:57). Other associations, this time with the Mondlanes of Mozambique and the Makwakwas, indicate that the Malulekes are more historically associated with the Chopi, Lenge and Tonga groups of Inhamane than with the groups of the Kalanga or Nyai who are identified with Karanga origins (Bandama, 2013:44). The intertwined histories of Tonga groups with Kalanga, Nyai, and other neighbouring people highlight the complexities of interethnic relations in southern Africa, characterized by both cooperation and conflict over territory, resources, and power. Ongoing research and scholarship, such as that referenced in this book, contribute to a deeper understanding of Tonga history and its intersections with the histories of other ethnic groups in the region, shedding light on previously overlooked aspects of their shared heritage.

Some research papers acknowledge that the origins of the Tonga people are illusive and “problematic” (Mazarire, 2020:10). The origins of the Tonga people are complex and debated among scholars, reflecting the difficulty of tracing the histories of diverse ethnic groups in Africa amid intricate patterns of migration, trade, and cultural interaction. As this book illustrates, various groups known as Tonga have a long history in their regions, predating much of the history of settlement of other “Bantu” groups.

Through vast interest in the Arab-dominated trade, and through plunder and conquest, the Nzou-Samanyanga dynasty is known to have made vassalages out of the original existing kingdoms of the early Tonga groups (Mazarire, 2020:14). From the north, the Mutapa dynasty seems to have gained immense power after absorbing the Tavara and some other Tonga groups, and the dynasty went on to grow into an even larger and dominant empire through years of plunder and conquest (Mazarire, 2020:14), while its central head of power was subjected to regular Arab and Portuguese conviction and alteration.

Referring specifically to the Kalanga people, Liesegang (2007:13) suggests that these may have originated from an eastern group of the Mapungubwe K2 formation, and are distinguished from the Tonga populations, also adding that the Tsonga language appears to have been already spoken at Delagoa Bay during the 1500s, a language that is known to have been quite different from Kalanga (Liesegang, 2007:13). In the analysis of Harries (1983:336) the Tonga people (also including the first groups of the Tsonga) are spoken of as being culturally and historically distinguishable from the Shangaans (different historical movements and some different cultural practices), and therefore are also seen as a distinct, separate group from the Nguni or Ngoni cluster. In Theal (1908:376) the Shangaan

Ngunis are referred to as the Vatwahs, seeming to denote what is sometimes spelled as 'Batua', who are spoken of in terms of being distinct from the Tonga people. In this description, the Tonga people came under attacks from the groups identified as the Vatwahs (Vatua) who are stated to be “kinsmen of the Zulus” (Theal, 1908:376), essentially being groups of the Ngoni, whereupon the Portuguese even purchased what was taken from these raids by the Vatuaahs. Harries’ and Theal’s analyses therefore distinguish the Tonga people, including many of the Tsonga groups, from the Nguni groups who invaded them, in a similar way to how the Tonga people of Otongue in the mid-1500s were distinguished from their Karanga invaders by Christian missionaries. This suggests that Tonga and Shangaan/Ngoni groups have different historical movements and cultural practices, supporting their classification as historically distinct ethnic groups. Both groups of the Shangaan Ngunis and the Karangas who settled in southern Mozambique appear to have lost their prior languages and certain cultural practices and adopted the language and culture of the people they found in those parts (Tsonga, Tswa, and Chopi). Hall (1909:404) then remarks on the distinction between the Karanga language and isiZulu, stating that there is not much of a relationship between the two, but that some Zulu words he had come across “were either derived from the Ba-

Tonga of the coast or from the Ba-Tonga of Inhambane and Limpopo districts". However in the Batonga kingdoms of Manica, Baroe and Mongas, as he states, the people there mostly spoke Karanga (Hall, 1909:404).

As already indicated through Earthy (1924:573), the Valenge and Vacopi are closely related, both groups being considered descendants of the same ancestral group. Their language, customary practices, geographic region, and settlement history is very much linked and this points to early Tonga populations who have over the years faced displacement and resettlement and largely fell under the influence of the Karangas who may have affected the development of language and traditions to some extent (Tracey, 1948:145). Their language, customs, and settlement history are linked, indicating a shared heritage and possibly shared experiences of displacement and resettlement. The influence of Karanga groups on the development of language and traditions among early Tonga populations is also important to understand, as this shows the complex interactions and cultural exchanges in the history of those parts along the southern coast of Mozambique.

The Lenge people are mostly found in southern Mozambique where the Limpopo River ends and flows into the Indian Ocean, who speak

the Xilenge language (sometimes spelled as Gilenge or Kilenge). Earthy (2009:103) considers Xilenge to be a language or dialect closely related to the language of the Chopi and Tonga groups of southern Mozambique. Ancestral groups of the Chopi could already be distinguished in the period 1560-1562, where the sixteenth-century monk, André Fernandes, is reported to have stayed with the people for over two years until he suffered from fever and his health deteriorated, forcing him to leave the country (Tracey, 1948:143). The Chopi identity, being fairly recent in comparison to the Tonga identity, is a faction of the old Tonga identity itself. This indicates a historical continuity and evolution of cultural identities in the region over time. It's been observed that the Tonga people of Inhambane have a shared culture, but even with them some lineages of traditional leaders and chiefs trace their origins to areas where Gitonga is not spoken. For instance, the old Cape Nyambiu (Nyambi) located north of Maxixe, is believed to have its roots among the Makwakwa groups, and Nyamposa situated south of the Inhambane city is thought to be the same as Tivane and of Nyai or Kalanga origin (Liesegang, 2014b). The northern Chopi people as an independent and distinct group in their own right, in the Zavala District, are led by the Zavala dynasty which claims descent from the Lobedu and Karanga people. In the 1940s they were led by Wani Zavala who was

considered paramount chief of the northern Chopi (Tracey, 1948:2). The northern Chopi people, led by the Zavala dynasty in the Zavala District, have a distinct dialect that sounds closer to the language spoken by the Tonga people of Inhambane (Tracey, 1948:2). This suggests linguistic diversity within the Chopi ethnic group, seemingly influenced by interactions with neighbouring Tonga communities.

The Chopi people used bows and arrows since ancient times, though this name '*vacopi*' (bow shooters) is thought to have come to popularity in Mozambique because of the Bahule of Makupulana/Macupulana who, using bows and arrows, defended their territory from intrusion against the Ngunis (Inguane, 2007:35). The army of the Gaza Ngunis, led by the general Magigwana Khosa, was defeated in this particular battle by the army of Bahule under the leadership of Makupulana (Inguane, 2007:35). This became famously known as the Battle of Bahule. Many further attempts were made by the Ngunis but they were unsuccessful, after which time Makupulana Langa was later to be tricked into an ambush and then slain, and ingesting the remains of Makupulana's body in some way signified to the Gaza Ngunis that they had defeated the Vacopi/Lenge of the Bahule Langa lineage (Inguane, 2007:35).

The phrase *Ku-copa*, 'Shooting arrows', is found in the Tsonga language as well as Chopi and Tswa, and does not feature in the native vocabulary of the Nguni or Sotho language groups. The term *mu-copi* (plural: *va-copi*) was applied to the Tonga, Tsonga, Lenge, and Karanga of the southern Mozambican coast by the Tsonga-speaking warriors who were incorporated into the Gaza-Nguni regiments in the mid-to-late 1800s, highlighting the role of indigenous weaponry in local conflicts.

Xipenenyana, as one successor to the Mondlane dynasty, was in charge of Mandlakazi in the 1890s. It is believed to have been Xipenenyana who initiated the effort to have the Gaza forces defeated and expelled from Mandlakazi which had been overrun by the Ngunis (Inguane, 2007:63). In the late 1800s, Bingwane/Binguane, one of Dzovo's grandchildren in the Limpopo Valley, successfully ruled and united a portion of the Chopis. He is said to have rallied them to resist against Mawewe, Muzila, and Nghunghunyana (Rita-Ferreira, 1975:30). This united resistance undoubtedly helped foster a sense of identity among the Chopis. To escape the invaders, some Chopis under Xipenenyane (Bingwane's son) fled northward, seeking refuge under the Tongas and Portuguese administration at Inhambane. Some of the armies were armed and organized by Chief "Nhofoco" (Nyafoko) and Colonel João



Laforte, who led the irregular Portuguese forces. Xipenenyana's men, together with the Bi-Tongas, successfully repelled the Gaza-Nguni warriors (Rita-Ferreira, 1975).

After the defeat of the Gaza Ngunis in 1895 the region fell under Portuguese administration, but recently various parts of that area have been under the Chopi chiefs (Theal, 1902:16). The involvement of Portuguese colonial forces and alliances with local chiefs like "Nhofoco" (Nyafoko) in repelling external threats further illustrates the complex interplay between local authority structures and colonial powers. The establishment of Portuguese administration in the aftermath of the defeat of the Gaza Ngunis marked a significant shift in political control, yet African leaders continued to exert influence and assert their autonomy over various parts of the region. Eduardo Mondlane, founding president of FRELIMO and one of the leading freedom fighters against Portuguese colonialism, is a near descendant of the same Mondlane dynasty of Xipenenyana that fought tirelessly to liberate Mandlakazi and other parts of southern Mozambique from Nguni and British annexation (Inguane, 2007:55). Eduardo Mondlane, a key figure in Mozambique's fight for independence, adds an important dimension to the historical story. His lineage, tied to the Mondlane dynasty, connects modern political movements to the ongoing resistance against colonialism. This link

emphasizes the persistence of historical struggles and the continued desire for self-determination and freedom among the people of southern Mozambique.

The region of southern Mozambique has seen much bloodshed, and being an area that had come under the influence of different groups striving for control and dominance, the region must have come under a lot of assimilation and genetic mixing. According to research in the genetic history of eastern and southern Africa, the area between the Great Lakes region and the Indian Ocean appears to have hosted much of the earliest people groups to have ventured towards the southern parts of Africa, and particularly Tanzanian populations covering its surrounding regions have contributed greatly to the genetic differentiation that is associated with the large-scale migration of the Africans into parts of southern Africa (Semo et al., 1989). The genetic study shows that the regions of Tanzania point to where much of the genetic dispersal of “Bantu” tribes in Mozambique and parts of South Africa stems from (Semo et al., 1989). The genetic history of eastern and southern Africa, as supported by research cited, provides valuable insights into the demographic and migratory patterns that have shaped the region's population dynamics. The genetic dispersal of African people groups (“Bantu”) from regions like Tanzania into Mozambique and South

Africa indicates the old connections and migrations that have contributed to the cultural and genetic diversity of southern Africa. These genetic studies complement the historical narratives by offering a deeper understanding of the population movements and interactions that have shaped the socio-cultural landscape of southern Africa.

The value of the ancient history of groups such as the Tonga and Karanga people should not be underestimated. In South Africa as well, groups that descend from the Tonga and Karanga people hold it in their oral testimonies and folklore how they share a common bond with these two ancient groups. The oral traditions and folklore of groups like the Tonga and Karanga serve as valuable sources of cultural history, preserving narratives of migration, settlement, and ancestral connections over generations. Genetics research also bears much light to support the ancient history of these South African tribes. Remarkably so, admixture dates in genetic research of the South African “Bantu” populations show that the Tsonga and Venda people carry the oldest genetic admixture of all South African Bantu-language speakers, as these two groups show admixtures from around 45 generations ago, while the other groups range from 24 to 33 generations ago (Sengupta et al., 2020). The study thus shows substantially that the populations stemming from southern

Mozambique and the north-eastern parts of South Africa belong to the oldest groups of people to have settled in the study region (Sengupta et al., 2020). Genetic studies offer tangible proof supporting the old history of “Bantu” populations in southern Africa. The discovery that Tsonga and Venda people possess the oldest genetic mixture indicates the extent of their historical presence in the area, which corroborates with historical records and oral traditions.

In a haplogroup study (Silva et al., 2015), sampled Tonga populations in Zambia paired closely within a common haplogroup classification with sampled populations from the Chopi people in southern Mozambique, who paired along with the Zambian groups (Totela, Mbukushu, Nkoya, Makoma, Luvala, Luyana) and also with sample groups found in Botswana (Lozi, Tswana, Kalanga). The research also shows a wide distribution of Tonga genetic dispersal across various geographic regions, one of the few groups to indicate such a widespread distribution in the study (Silva et al., 2015). Haplogroup studies reveal genetic connections between different “Bantu” populations, such as the Tonga of Zambia and the Chopi of Mozambique, indicating shared ancestry and historical interactions across geographic regions. This suggests a complex pattern of

migration and genetic exchange among southern African populations.

In a separate study on the genetic history of southern Africa (Salas et al., 2002:1082), it is found that the southeast “Bantu” speakers show “a composite origin on the maternal line of their descent”, where 44% of the lineages studied show a West African origin and 21% being either from an origin in Western or Central Africa; 30% stemming from an East African origin, and 5% from Khoikhoi and San groups from southern Africa, along the maternal lines of descent. The diverse genetic heritage of southeast “Bantu” speakers, revealed by a significant maternal lineage origin, presents their composite origins. This diversity indicates centuries of interactions and migrations across Africa, enriching our comprehension of southern Africa's complex history.

## Resettlement and Colonial Displacement

The first colonial interference faced by the Tonga people at Mozambique can be traced to the period dominated by the Magadoxo (Mugadishu) Arabs, after which time came the Persians, and later the Portuguese (Hall, 1909:199). The demand for gold, tusks, iron, and slaves certainly pushed invading forces towards those regions that had been largely occupied by the Tonga and other Mozambican tribes. Towards the north of Mozambique a Muslim dynasty was established at Kilwa along the coast of Tanzania in the eleventh century (Ilife, 2007:55). This dynasty was overthrown by the Mahdali, who are thought to have originated from Yemen, and who dominated the gold trade between Great Zimbabwe and the coast of Sofala in the 1300s (Ilife, 2007:55). A source makes a reference to some of the Zanj being among the population of Kilwa, some of whom had been captured by the Sultan of Kilwa (who could speak a purer form of Kiswahili free of Arabic words) in raids and are distinguished from the Arabs, being described as being “of very black complexion” (Ilife, 2007:55). The historical accounts of colonial interference in Mozambique provide insights into the complex interactions between indigenous people and external powers over the centuries. The succession of Arab, Persian, and eventually

Portuguese influences in the region reflects the strategic importance of Mozambique's coastal areas for trade and resources. The Portuguese made their first known reach to Sofala in 1497, and other attempts were made to reach the African coast with the crews of the S. João on 3 February 1552, followed by the S. Bento, the Santiago, the S. Thome, and the S. Alberto individually (Theal, 1902:277). Some of the crew of these ships were able to make it to land on the east coast of southern Africa (Mozambique in particular), while some of them succumbed to the ferociousness of the sea (Theal, 1902:277). Upon his arrival in Mozambique in 1498, Vasco Da Gama came across some Tsonga chiefs in the area of the Nyarimi (Inharime River). The encounters between Portuguese explorers and indigenous people, as documented in the early expeditions to Sofala and the African coast, marked the beginning of European colonial expansion into the region. Under orders from the king of Portugal, Sebastiao, Manuel de Mesquita Perestrello in January of 1576 managed to reach the coastal area of southern Africa at the Cape of Good Hope (Theal, 1902:289). These expeditions, led by figures like Manuel de Mesquita Perestrello, signify Portugal's ambitions to establish trade routes and colonial outposts along the African coast.

In the mid-1500s, according to Theal (1902:226), Gamba who was part of the Karanga dynasty who went on to become a new ruler at

Otongue after defeating the old Tongas of southern Inhambane Province, requested for missionaries to occupy Otongue in a bid to secure relations with the Portuguese. Father Andre Fernandes was sent in and immediately took on the task to baptise Gamba. The historical accounts of colonial interference in Mozambique highlight the multifaceted nature of interactions between indigenous people and external forces, shaping the socio-political landscape of Mozambique and influencing its subsequent history. Gamba, who was from the Karanga dynasty, worked with Portuguese missionaries, which shows how tribal leaders and colonial powers cooperated to establish dominance. When Father André Fernandes baptized Gamba, it combined religious change with politics to help Portugal gain political and religious influence in the area. This was when Christianization began on a large scale in the region, and where the groundwork for future missionary work was laid (Theal, 1898:68):

state. I should be very glad, if it were only to serve me at Mass, and attend to the house until your Reverence provides another in his place, on account of his indisposition. If he does not come, I have made my plans. I will baptize all those I can in the kraals within a quarter of a league, and more if possible, I will teach the Christian doctrine here and there, and recommend myself to God, until your Reverence provides as you think best for God's service, but at present I am sometimes alone, sometimes with a brother to help me, and sometimes with a father to direct me, and feel more courage and consolation than if I were in the middle of sweet France among my brethren by the grace and goodness of God. May He give us grace to be conformable to His will in all things.

From Otongue the 24th of June 1560.

Unprofitable servant,

ANDRÉ FERNANDES.



According to Hall (1909), Gamba's main village was located near a big river called the Inharingue River, which flowed directly to the sea and had some tidal influence. The village was surrounded by tall mountains and was about a league and a half north of the river. It took the locals two days and one night to travel from Gamba's village to Inhambane without stopping, while Father Fernandes took almost four days to walk from Inhambane to the village. The new people at Otongue, called Ma-Karanga, had rebelled against their leader but were unsuccessful. They were forced southeast and settled at Otongue, taking over the land from a section of the local Batonga people whom they had defeated. Gamba's second main village was at the mouth of the Inharingue River, where the people were also Batonga (Hall, 1909). The period discussed marks a significant phase in the Christianization of the region, as missionary activities gained momentum, particularly with the establishment of Gamba's chief kraal and subsequent alliances with Portuguese missionaries. Gamba's kraal's strategic location near the Inharingue River facilitated communication and trade with coastal ports, signifying the interconnectedness of inland communities with trade networks. The displacement of the Ma-Karanga people to Otongue and their subsequent conflicts with the local Batonga inhabitants gives an idea of the complex dynamics of territorial disputes and settlement

patterns in pre-colonial Mozambique. By 1644 various groups such as the Karangas, Tongas, Makuhas, and others had indeed fallen victim to the high activity of trade along the Mozambican coast, and subsequently many were sent off to work aboard the traders' ships or to be shipped off to Brazil to work in sugar plantations, a time where slavery became a lucrative business to the European and Asian sailors (Theal, 1902: 383-384).

The early Tonga people of Mozambique even during the 1400s-1600s were already using shields, spears and assegais (Theal, 1908:376), clearly indicating some capacity to defend themselves. As hunters and traders who had built up substantial independent kingdoms in the area, the Tonga people of Inhambane in Mozambique are shown to have had a wider distribution in earlier times before groups of the now Tsonga-speaking and Nguni from the 1700s-1800s drove them towards various directions (Evers, 1974:10). Much of the trade at Inhambane, however, remained in the hands of the Tonga of Inhambane, while the Tsonga people dominated trade between the interior and the Delagoa Bay (Evers, 1974:10). N'wanati history is dominated by the belief that the name N'wanati originates from the N'wanati River near Mandlakazi. Subsequent narratives suggest that one of the first settlements of Malenga (N'wanati's son) on his journey towards the north-west was at today's Mabalane area found

towards the north of the Limpopo River, where his people inherited the name Maluleke, a name associated with that particular long journey (Ekblom et al., 2017:57). His sons Muswana and Maxakadzi married daughters from the Manganyi family of Bungu who were settled nearby at a place called N'wamahunyani. One of Malenga's sons, Maxakadzi, according to Ekblom *et al.* (2017:57) settled at Panhame where he fought the Vanyai for many years, but it was Malenga's grandchildren who made the final defeat. The Dlamani branch ultimately settled in what is today the northern Limpopo province near Pafuri where they secured much of the area between Inhambane (Mozambique) and the north-eastern part of the Limpopo region from encroachment, and the Guyu branch dominating the land beginning from what is today known as the Kruger National Park up to the Limpopo River (Ekblom et al., 2017:57). The narratives surrounding the N'wanati people, particularly their migration history and settlement patterns, shed light on the complex movements of these people. The lineage of Malenga and the subsequent settlement of his descendants in areas like the Limpopo at Pafuri illustrate the dispersion and territorial consolidation of N'wanati groups in response to external pressures and internal conflicts. The establishment of branches like the Dlamani and Guyu further symbolises the expansion and consolidation of

N'wanati territories across present-day Mozambique and South Africa, today contributing to the cultural and political landscape of both countries.

The Tsonga people did face many challenges in South African territory, and often these challenges were in the form of colonial exploitation and political persuasion. João Albasini was one of the most popular of administrative figures in the Zoutpansberg region in the latter half of the 1800s, who was essentially a slave trader and hunter who had been commissioned by the Portuguese Consul to administer within the Zoutpansberg and other potential areas of what the Afrikaners termed the Spelonken, and a tax collector of note for the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek. Albasini was tasked with keeping the local black population under white administration and he often engaged in trade, conquest, and animal hunting in the region (Hay, 2015:42). The Afrikaner administrators at the Zoutpansberg often depended on Albasini's services. These Afrikaners were to sometimes hire the service of servants under João Albasini who comprised mostly of Tsonga-speaking groups (Hay, 2015:51), who were especially Tsonga-speaking warriors from the Lebombo Mountains near Swaziland and a few from the Ndebele and Venda people. Albasini and Michael Buys would command some of the most vicious raids, enslaving even children (Hay, 2015:51). It was also not

unusual for these groups and the Boers to hunt elephants in the region, even during the time of their settlement at the new town of Schoemansdal in 1848 (Hay, 2015:48).

In the Limpopo province, Beja which is located near the Albasini farm and park area was portioned into a farming zone at a time around the end of the 1800s (Kruger, 2019:5). The archaeological history of the site is perhaps illusive to the current bearers as well as the old ones where much is still rampant on the site that bears testimony to early human settlement and trade operations that once marked that landscape. The farm that had been acquired by João Albasini is just near the Beja area, and being such a rich and fertile place with a dam large enough to attract human settlers and animals alike, early settlement at the area has certainly been camped by early groups who have appeared to face displacement at the hands of later inhabitants. Albasini's acquisition of land near the Beja area and his subsequent settlement there signify the displacement of African groups and the encroachment of European settlers into previously inhabited territories. The archaeological significance of the area attests to its long history of human settlement and trade, yet the legacy of displacement and exploitation remains ingrained in its landscape.

João Albasini is described by Kruger (2019:31) as a slave trader and hunter who was born in 1813 in Lisbon (Portugal). Coming from an Italian family but birthed on a Portuguese ship, he arrived in Lourenço Marques in 1831 and commenced his trading business, and after arriving in the Lydenburg area in around 1845-1846 began trading operations with one trading post he had established near Kgoshi Magashula's kraal (one of the early Mapulana chiefdoms), another at Manungukop run by one headman Manungu, and a third one near Ship Mountain run by another headman named Josekhulu (Kruger, 2019:31). Many refugees came to stay with Albasini at this point, most of who were seeking the protection of Albasini against the Gaza-Nguni after 1845. Before Albasini's settlement into those parts of South Africa and before the large influx of refugees into the area prior to the 1840s, many parts of the country had already been settled by earlier groups of the Beja Tonga and sections of the Dau. In the year 1847 Albasini married Maria Petronella Janse van Rensburg and in the same year bought a farm at Rustplaas outside of Ohrigstad in the Lydenburg area, and shortly afterwards in 1848 moved to a new location in the new town of Schoemansdal below the Zoutpansberg mountains, where a group of Afrikaner Voortrekkers also settled. His African followers from the Lydenburg area (many of who were Tsonga-speaking and others of Swazi origin) were sent to

live on the farm known as Goedewensch at Piesangkop. He was later to be appointed as the vice-consul of Portugal in 1858, being directly responsible for overseeing much of the Portuguese interests in the region and especially to oversee much of the trading and taxation activities among the local Africans and the Afrikaners (Kruger, 2019:31). Albasini's trading operations and alliances with local African leaders, such as Kgoshi Magashula and others highlight the complex network of relationships that characterized colonial encounters in southern Africa. His marriage to Maria Petronella Janse van Rensburg and his appointment as vice-consul of Portugal further cemented his position of authority and influence in the region, enabling him to oversee Portuguese interests and trading activities among local Africans and Afrikaners alike. When Albasini arrived in the Venda-dominated area near Makhado, at Schoemansdal in 1848, some of the Tsonga-speaking people such as the Malulekes had already been settled nearby and interacting with the Venda people in those parts, most notably during 1834-1838 (Dicke, 1926; Harries, 1987). Albasini's story exemplifies the entanglement of European colonialism, African resistance, and socio-economic exploitation in southern Africa during the 19th century, indicating the lasting impact of these historical dynamics on the region's social, cultural, and economic environment.

A short distance away from Beja and the Albasini park is Valdezia, where in 1875 the Swiss missionaries purchased the farm Klipfontein situated at the Rivubye River (Levhubu) that had been in the possession of Scot John Watt (a Scottish trader and businessman) who had attained this piece of land during the British administration of the Transvaal, and the name was changed to Valdezia Mission Station (Ravhudzulo, 2011). Valdezia served as the first place among the Tsonga-dominated areas in South Africa to evangelise the local Tsonga people, where subsequently the first Tsonga hymn book and Bible were developed. Over a decade after the British had given the Transvaal to the Boers in 1881, the Swiss Mission station at Elim was to be established in 1897 (Ravhudzulo, 2011), an area not very far from Beja and Mutonga and seems to have been settled, too, by early groups of the Tsonga even prior to 1900 judging from various historical sources (Liesegang, 2014a:25; Paver, 1933:605; Das Neves, 1878:91). At Mhinga a mission station was also established in 1897 (Ravhudzulo, 2011).

The period 1902-1907 was a time of hostility and mistreatment against the Mhinga section in particular under the administration of Stevenson-Hamilton, who was not on good terms with Mhinga who was seen to be offensive towards the whites (Carruthers, 1995:44). Stevenson-Hamilton set his sights on removing the Mhingas



completely from the zones regarded by the government as game reserves (Carruthers, 1995:44). In August of 1903 around two to three thousand African people had been forcefully removed from the Sabi Game Reserve, and between 1905 and 1906 moves were executed to tax and begin the process of forced removals from other areas that were to be designated as game reserves (Carruthers, 1995:43). This period marked the first large-scale resettlements of people under the Mhinga leadership after 1903 (Shehab, 2011:85). The Makuleke section also faced forced removals from their ancestral land in 1928 when they were forcefully removed from Old Makuleke by the authority under the command of Stevenson-Hamilton and were relocated to the west at Mabiligwe (Turner, 2004:4). The Makuleke area was then declared a game reserve. Some of the Makulekes moved into Mozambique and others relocated to the south-eastern parts of Zimbabwe. The national government established protected areas in the old Makuleke region and the Afrikaners cleared them completely from the Pafuri area to be resettled at Ntlhaveni on 13 September 1969, and in 1971 the Kruger National Park was extended to incorporate the remaining areas (Turner, 2004:1). The creation of protected areas and the expansion of the Kruger National Park onto Makuleke land show how colonial dispossession affected African communities in South Africa. The

Makuleke people were forced off their land, with some moving to Mozambique and south-eastern Zimbabwe. This shows how displacement has cross-border impacts and how colonial history still affects social and political situations. The history of missionary activities and forced removals in Tsonga-dominated areas displays the complicated processes of cultural assimilation, resistance, and dispossession that have characterized the colonial and post-colonial experiences of African people in southern Africa.

The forced removals experienced by the Mhinga and Makuleke sections of the N'wanati clan bear striking similarity to the displacement of the Tonga people in the Gwembe Valley of Zambia due to the construction of the Kariba Dam. Like the Makuleke and Mhinga, the Tonga people of Zambia faced upheaval and dispossession as a result of large-scale development projects aimed at meeting the energy needs of the region (Scudder, 2005:8). Many of the 57,000 resettled people were left impoverished after they were dislocated from the Kariba Lake (Scudder, 2005:8). In 1958 the World Bank funded the building of the Kariba Gorge hydroelectric dam, which in the 1960s became the world's largest artificial lake (Colson, 2001:50-51). Despite the need for a stable energy supply, the building of the dam caused the large-scale displacement of the indigenous Tonga population, to be further divided along the Zambia

and Zimbabwe border when one part settled on the Zimbabwean side and the other left on the Zambian side (Colson, 2001). The making of Lake Kariba, the biggest man-made lake at the time, showed the massive changes to the environment and the people's lives caused by building the dam. Splitting the Tonga people across the Zambia-Zimbabwe border shows how forced resettlement can affect geopolitics and society, with communities broken up and spread out across different countries. The experiences of the Tonga people in the Gwembe Valley serve as a strong reminder of the human costs associated with large-scale development projects and the importance of considering the rights and welfare of indigenous communities in such endeavours. The parallels between the forced removals of the Tonga people of Zambia and the Mhinga and Makuleke sections of the N'wanati clan were common case with many other groups of Africans and reflect the broader patterns of dispossession and marginalization faced by African people in southern Africa in the face of development-driven displacement.

## **Concluding Statements**

The process of assimilation has deeply influenced the development of African culture and state formation across the continent, including among the diverse Tonga groups found in southern Africa. Over the course of their long history, various Tonga groups have undergone assimilation, resulting in the emergence of distinct cultural elements within these related tribes. Part of this book has expanded on how the term 'Tsonga' is derived from the older term 'Tonga' that dates back to ancient times and was used to describe the early inhabitants of Inhambane and other regions in Mozambique and South Africa.

Originating from a north-eastern region of Africa, the Tonga groups have experienced a series of migrations and conquests that have shaped their identity and culture. Cultural similarities between the Tonga and people of Sofala, such as the practice of circumcision and a fondness for maritime life, suggest influences from Semitic practices or instead native African practices that were passed onto later civilizations out of Africa. This cultural exchange is evident in customs like the extraction of fermented beverages from coconut fruit and the preparation of dishes and sugarcane juice. Even with colonism and later political shifts causing disruptions, numerous

African cultures have endured and changed over the years. Traditional customs, languages, and beliefs still greatly influence the identities and ways of life of today's African communities. The N'wanati clan, a key part of the Tonga ancestral groups, belonged to an ancient dynasty that included various establishments and titles such as Tongwe, Pajila, Manyika, Makwakwa, Maluleke, and Mondlane, among others. However, during the Portuguese occupation in the 1500s, much of the historical recording focused on the conquests of the Mutapa Empire, overshadowing the earlier history of the Tonga kingdoms, however the N'wanati people have preserved their oral history through native intellect and are able to recount their roots to a group known as the Beja Tonga who are traced to have settled in southern Africa in the very distant past. Records from Arab sources also provide glimpses into the pre-colonial state formations of Tonga ancestral groups in Mozambique before the thirteenth century. The account of Massoude encountering the Wak-Wak provides valuable historical evidence of early interactions between Asian travellers and indigenous African groups in southern Mozambique. It sheds light on the diversity of cultures and societies present in the region during the 10th century.

The Beja Tonga people, migrating southward, established the earliest documented Tonga kingdoms in southern Africa between 200 AD and

500 AD, with the southernmost part of one of their largest establishments known as Vutonga (Wutonga). This region, documented by Arab and Portuguese sources as "Otongue" and "Botonga" in the 1500s, became a significant centre of Tonga culture and influence. Also known in Mozambican local history as Wutonga, the place is deserving of the title of an archaeological site located in that Mozambican region of southern Africa. It is believed to have been an ancient settlement of the Wutonga people (Vatonga or Batonga), an African group that lived in the region during the Iron Age. The Tonga people seem to have been very early entrants into the region, having been preceded by native hunter-gatherer communities (earliest independent activity showing mostly from approximately 300 BCE to 1100 CE). The Wutonga people were known for their iron-working skills, and it is believed that the site was an important centre for the production and trade of iron goods. Archaeological excavations at the site have uncovered a large number of iron-working artifacts, including slag, tuyeres, and hammers. The people are much like other Africans in that they have their ancestry linking back to the oldest African people.

Additionally, Vutonga is thought to have been an important centre for trade and interaction between different groups in the region. Artifacts found at the site suggest that the Tonga people had contact

with other groups, including the Swahili-speaking people of the East African coast, and that they traded goods such as glass beads, ceramics, and cowrie shells. Vutonga should be considered an important site for understanding the Iron Age cultures of southern Africa.

Correlating with this history is the presence of Rhonga/Thonga communities stretching from Maputo to the north of KwaZulu Natal. Before it was incorporated into the Zulu Kingdom due to British colonial pressure, the land of the Tembe people of the Makasana lineage in the north of KwaZulu Natal was also known internationally as Amatongaland (Tongaland), which should not be confused with the Butonga/Otongue/Wutonga of southern Mozambique, although it is evident and corroborated that over time the people contributed to a similar language and many identical cultural practices. Within the broader umbrella of Tsonga or Thonga/Tonga identity, there exists significant cultural diversity among different clans and communities. These variations manifest in traditions, customs, and dialectical differences within the Tsonga language.

Various groups who are referred to as Tonga, as this present book and other historical records show, have a very early history in their first settlements in southern Africa, and preceded much of the

settlement history of other “Bantu” tribes of the same area. With the historical records given, I am inclined to believe that the associations between the established references to the Wak-Wak, the Zanj, the Beja and the various sections of the Tonga people are not simply coincidental. The presented fact that Tonga groups throughout history have occupied some of the most important archaeological regions, with particular reference to the Mozambican area and parts of Zimbabwe and South Africa, and through sharing some similar customs, migration history and an old genetic history, gives thorough evidence to show that there was at least a very close and ancient relationship between the various Tonga groups. This study has however focused on giving irrefutable historical evidence of a vast network of traders and hunters who have developed thriving kingdoms or states in various parts of southern Africa, who have faced a series of disruptions and displacements throughout their recorded history of settlement.

One of the most notable dynastic establishments that encompassed parts of Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique is that of the ancient Beja Tonga, which has been elusive to trace in the mainstream history but has however left a noticeable imprint through much of what has been left out in the historical narratives of the regions south-east of Africa where clearly the Tonga people have



a very early and important history that is testament of the ancient presence of the Bantu in southern Africa. The land that had been covered by groups of the Tonga people, stretching from the northern parts of the Zambezi above Sofala to the south over Maputo, dwarfing many modern states, seems to have been a large enough concern to have invited a range of interests and anxiety where trade and mineral wealth was concerned.

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